## BUSION AUG 2024 VOLUME 5, ISSUE 08 | AUG 2024 Civil and municipal



Mayor Finkam

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Back to school and back to work. These realities are facing families across North America as summer bids farewell and the fall takes center stage. Businesses and Cities large and small across the continent are also gearing up for the fall and the fourth financial quarter of 2024.

Offering bold initiatives, adapting to economic challenges, and putting resident and customer-first policies in place to meet the demands of the fall months that lie ahead.

Business View continues to cover it all, bringing to our valued readers the very best sector-focus series and business success stories across the continent.

We are proud to be bringing our valued readers leading coverage of leading school districts across the US and Canada as we continue with our special sector-focused series in our August issue. Education remains a major economic driver as school districts across North America prepare kids for the jobs of today as well as those jobs that will surface in the new economy.

Adapting educational focus to meet the demands of today's careers for youth remains a top priority as well as prioritizing technology training and focusing on work and co-op experiences for their students. It is clear from our deep dive series that school districts are successfully pivoting to meet the needs of jobs and careers of the future.

We sat down with school officials from Ansonia Public Schools, Buffalo Public Schools, Jackson Local School District, Romeo Community Schools, and on the post-secondary end, Northern Industrial Training to discuss their work-focused education and training programs. All of those we spoke to highlighted the key role that core values, career readiness, and educational initiatives have played, in preparing our students for future success.

August saw resident-focused economic projects swing into full gear for the municipalities we spoke with for this month's issue. We sat down with city officials from Andover, Kansas, Benson, Arizona, Carmel, Indiana, Fillmore, California, Hardeeville,

South Carolina, Kerrville, Texas among other fastgrowing municipalities.

Commercial growth coupled with residential growth has propelled these municipalities into representing some of the fastest-growing regions across North America as they continue to implement core infrastructure initiatives for their residents.

Our July issue also brings top-tier company profiles including Chroma Energy Group, Dockside Tow and Stow, Gib-San Pools, Kristian Electric, and Longs Drugs (CVS Hawaii) among others as we dove head first into some of the key attributes that make these companies leaders in their field.

With a robust economy to propel them forward and the woes of the pandemic firmly behind them, all these companies are steering their economic engines towards further growth in the latter half of 2024.

As we continue to bring you the very best sector and industry-focused features, we hope that you have a little extra time to get outside to read them and welcome the warm spring weather at your doorstep.

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Karen Surca Editor in Chief

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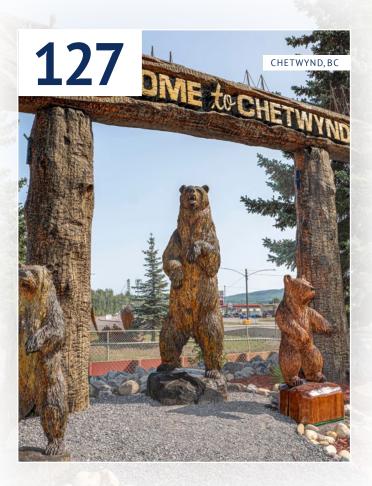
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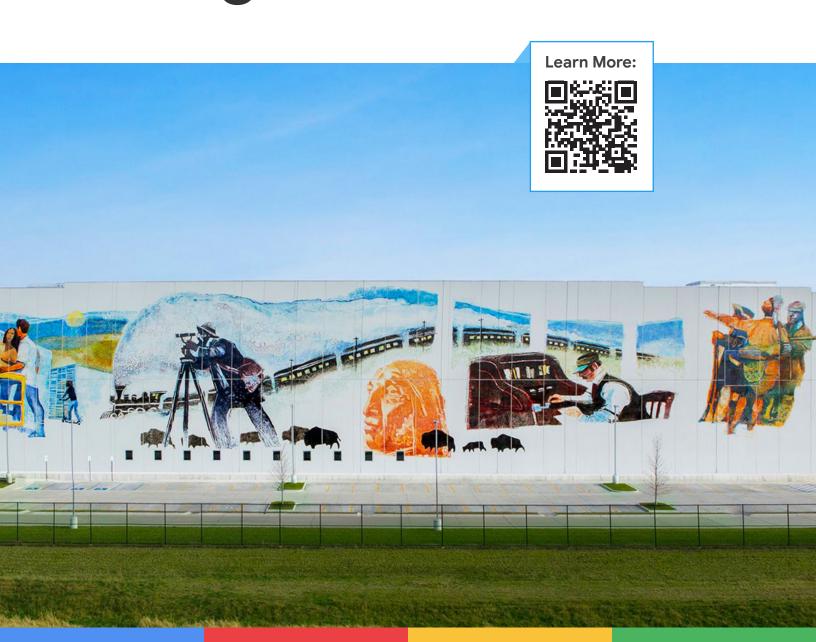
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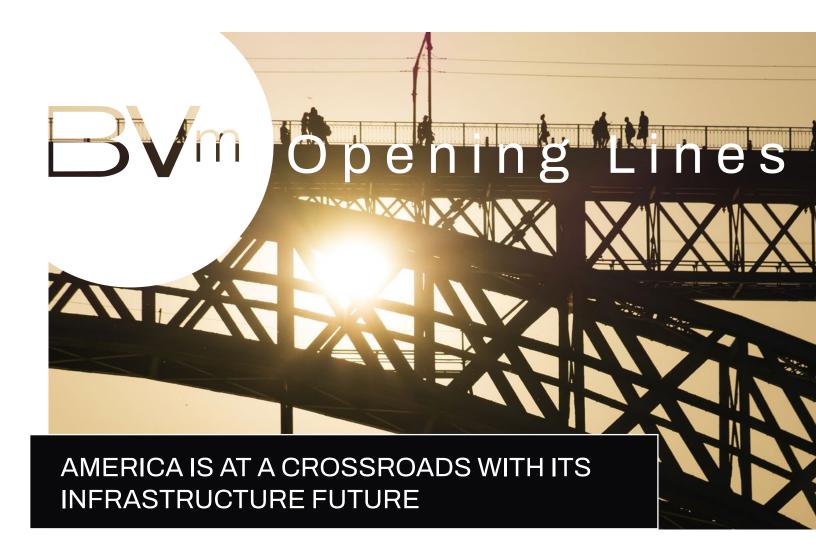
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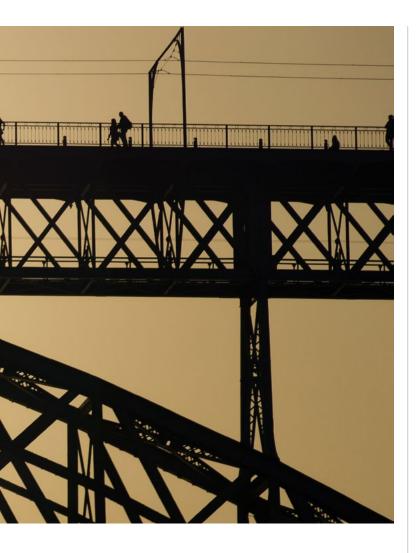
Source- https://www.americancityandcounty.com/ , Maria Lehman, First published Aug 23, 2024

The first step to solving a problem is admitting there is a problem in the first place. Much of America's infrastructure was built 50 to 100 years ago and has not been replaced or modernized to meet current needs and doesn't address the needs of the future. Since 1998, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has released the Report Card for America's Infrastructure, which, every four years, does a deep dive into the state of various infrastructure categories. It provides both a letter grade and a narrative to explain how we need to work for future infrastructure needs. Simply put, for the past three decades, the grades have not been the kind you want to bring home to your parents.

You cannot build a modern economy on top of crumbling infrastructure. Across the country, we are experiencing disastrous consequences in terms of human health and safety as well as economic impacts in insuring assets, along with the cost of rebuilding in the wake of a disaster. It does not matter if it is climate change-related or man-

made. In response to these consequences, the ASCE released the Sustainable Infrastructure Standard, ASCE 73-23, a tool that provides guidance for infrastructure owners to develop and implement sustainable solutions throughout a project's entire life cycle. It's designed for a range of civil projects from energy to water to transportation systems and acts as a guide for engineers to develop and implement practices that promote sustainability and long-term reliability of infrastructure projects. It was introduced in October 2023, and we are starting to see the benefits of its implementation in projects across the country.

Nonetheless, America's communities are at a crossroads. A new survey and report released in July by GHD, a global engineering firm, reveals a mix of optimism and pessimism about the future needs of America's infrastructure. Thirteen thousand people worldwide were surveyed, including 4,000 in the U.S., with a focus on responses from California, Florida, New York and Texas. It presents a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of intergenerational equity, which is focused on creating fair and just spaces that prioritize all generations, both now



and in the future—all through an infrastructure lens. The survey results and report highlight the need for public infrastructure owners and consultants to listen carefully to their stakeholders to make better infrastructure development decisions.

Resilience and adaptability of infrastructure are vital in mitigating the impacts of climate change, population growth and redistribution and economic fluctuations.

In the past few years, there have been several bills, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), that have significantly increased the federal share of infrastructure funding for the first time in decades. It is a recognition that the state of our current infrastructure needs to improve. Roads, bridges, water lines and other public infrastructure are a fundamental right, not a privilege, in a modern society.

It should be noted that there has been support on both sides of the political spectrum for these bills. Not only were

the votes bipartisan, but even those who may not have been supportive in the past are now seeing the positive impacts on their constituents and their communities. Today's Congress disagrees on many policy or funding topics, but infrastructure is the exception. A recent great example is the Water Resources Development Act. WRDA is a bi-annual authorization bill that authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue implementing key projects and studies that address water resource challenges nationwide. The Senate passed its bill by unanimous consent in August, and the House passed its version in July. WRDA is now off to a conference committee and will hopefully be signed into law before the current authorization expires in December.

In May, the ASCE released an economic report, Bridging the Gap, which reinforced the need for continued federal infrastructure investment to save jobs and grow the economy. It finds that recent federal legislation addressing the nation's rapidly growing infrastructure needs will save American families an average of \$700 per year and save U.S. industries more than \$1 trillion in gross output, including \$637 billion in savings to the Gross Domestic Product if these newly established funding levels are maintained through 2033. That means lawmakers need to consider the next round of infrastructure investment since the BIL funding expires in 2026. The report shows the benefits of infrastructure investment to almost every industry. Here's a link to the report. Take a minute and check it out.

With the supplemental funding and focus on better delivery for the future, we must understand the needs for the next 50 years to deliver more durable and sustainable infrastructure. With the increase in funding and activity, we must ensure that the work is engineered to meet the current and future needs for not only the design and useful life of an asset but also for its financial life. There are many examples of infrastructure that is not meeting its financial life, where disasters are destroying assets before the general municipal bonds have matured. Or Public Private Partnerships that are renegotiated because there are serious challenges to a project's financial viability.

The solution to our infrastructure challenges is funding and financing by both the public and private sectors at all levels, so true risk-sharing partnerships are vital to unleashing private capital, as we have seen in many areas around the world. We desperately need to work together. The future is bright if we collaborate!

## IVIL AND MUNICIPAL

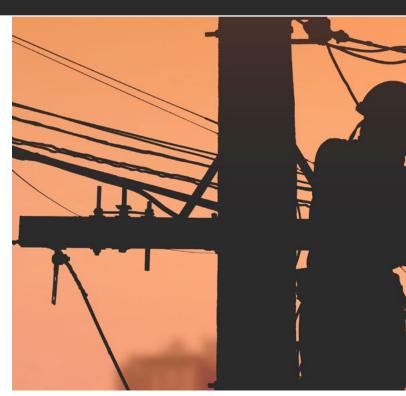
## TEAMWORK BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND UTILITI SPELLS SAFER, SWIFTER POWER RESTORATION

Source- https://www.americancityandcounty.com/, Mike Zappone, First published Aug 02, 2024

An East Coast electric utility manager recently shared that his organization created an online portal for local government leaders across its service territory. The goal of the portal, in part, is to request in advance of a storm (or major event) each locality's top three priorities for restoring power. Through the portal, there is also two-way communication between the utility's community liaison and government leaders and police and fire chiefs. The utility can also tap data from its outage management system to tell local officials which circuits, substations, pumping stations and other assets are without power and how many crews are working on restoration.

Not every locality has the technological or financial means to communicate about power restoration to the extent mentioned above. But there are a variety of ways to foster closer ties with electric utilities and their trade allies, especially before trouble strikes. The benefit is safely speeding up power restoration and shortening the tail of a storm.

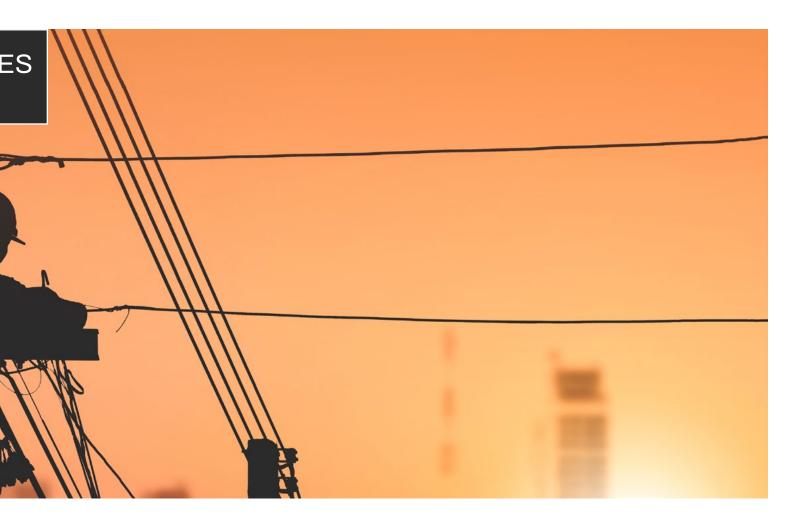
For example, to help coordinate the work of damage assessment and restoration during storms, a Northeastern utility established a public safety unit as a branch of its emergency response team and incident command system (ICS). The unit liaises with local fire and police departments to make addressing blocked roads and downed wires a priority even before restoration. Here's how it works: In the wake of a storm, police can contact their utility liaison about an emergency with a single call, text or email. The emergency might be a driver trapped in a car with a downed wire laying on the vehicle. The utility, in turn, would make this a priority-one response. A utility crew assigned to fire and rescue work would then head for the scene. With that alignment and streamlined communication, government leaders and utilities can safely expedite emergency response and ultimately power restoration.



By designating liaisons, pre-staging equipment and rehearsing scenarios and roles, each entity knows the other's capabilities before a storm or major event. If clearing roads is the priority, the utility will know how many apparatuses the local department of public works has for the job. The electric utility can then earmark resources to accompany each apparatus and manage downed power lines that would complicate debris removal. Joint planning also allows all the entities to speak with one voice in updating the community and other stakeholders about the estimated time of restoration, or ETR. This builds trust with constituents, too, because all parties are working with the same information.

#### **ADOPTING JOINT EXERCISES**

For a municipality, joint planning starts internally by assessing each department to ensure managers have their business continuity and emergency response plans. Once they have their plans, government managers would run drills (drawing on a utility's past storm data related to numbers of outages, poles down, roads blocked, etc.) with their utility



counterparts to make sure the plans hold up. From there, government leaders and their utilities can share their plans with private sector counterparts and run simulations.

#### **PUT IN PLACE AN INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM**

Rehearsing for the worst-case scenarios is critical, but so is having a structure for directing resources. Utilities began adopting ICS in the early 2010s after major storms like Hurricanes Irene and Sandy battered the Northeast United States, and they needed to improve their response. With ICS, there is one incident commander for the utility, and the support teams are trained in specific functional areas. Objectives and deadlines are established from the outset to facilitate consistent communications internally, with the public, regulators, and local, state and federal officials, so everyone knows the extent of the issue and when they can expect power to be restored.

Even long before a storm strikes, local and county

government officials can take it upon themselves to meet with a utility's incident commander and staff. The utility IC can bring these officials in to observe and participate in a utility's annual exercises. Establishing community partnerships between government and incident commanders before a storm is a critical opportunity to set priorities for re-energizing assets. In these meetings, government officials can add or even elevate the importance of what might be a low-visibility location like a water or sewage treatment plant.

Once government officials and utilities establish stronger relationships, the parties should be mindful of promotions and elections because these events may require introducing oneself to new members of the "government-utility team." By keeping an eye on people who are changing roles, there is an opportunity to cultivate and educate a new contact who will benefit from understanding the government-utility team's overall storm plan. Building and maintaining these connections before a major outage ultimately means faster restoration of services for constituents.

## MANATEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TRANSFORMS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE SERVICE

Source- https://www.americancityandcounty.com/ , Julie Bechwith, First published Aug 16, 2024

Residents are flocking to Manatee County, Fla. From 2010 to 2021, the county's population grew by a whopping 33% to 429,000. And while the number of citizens increases, the local sheriff's office is faced with a familiar challenge: an ongoing shortage of officers.

According to a 2024 survey by public sector HR management company, NEOGOV, which explored the effects of the ongoing hiring crisis on the public sector, 33% of agencies report impacts to service. The 700 public sector HR professionals and job seekers who were surveyed also note that law enforcement is one of the hardest areas to fill. Between 2019 and 2023, there was a 40% increase in the number of job openings for police officers. At the same time, the number of applications per job decreased by 39%.

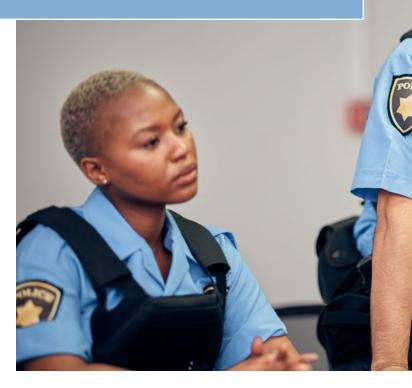
Understanding the nature of today's job market and the importance of effectively recruiting and retaining its employees, the HR department at Manatee County Sheriff's Office took important steps to transform the way it evaluates employees' and managers' performance. The goal: to bring accountability and consistency to the performance management process, boosting morale and improving retention over the long term.

#### **RECOGNIZING THE NEED**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in Manatee County increased "3.8% between 2021 and 2022." The Manatee County Sheriff's Office has experienced this growth first-hand. In the past nine years, the agency went from serving 360,000 citizens to more than 430,000 citizens today. As the population grows, so does the need to make processes more efficient to best serve the needs of the community and its employees.

The Manatee County Sheriff's Office's HR team recognized that its method of performance evaluation, which was time-consuming and required extensive spreadsheets and paper forms, was no longer sustainable.

Additionally, supervisors who are often responsible for 10 to 12 officers, some that require monthly evaluations,



were tasked with manually drafting in-depth evaluations. This resulted in generic performance reviews and neglected the important relationship between supervisor and employee.

With a focus on streamlining processes and improving employee retention in the face of hiring challenges, the HR team recognized a strong need to better engage with and provide consistent feedback to employees and managers alike.

#### PREPARATION IS KEY TO SUCCESS

Before choosing a system, the HR team took two key steps to prepare to transform the agency's performance evaluation process:

1. Start with an audit. The HR team began by taking a detailed look at their existing employee evaluation processes to identify core strengths and weaknesses. Public sector agencies are often forced to adapt private sector technologies, despite their unique needs. The Manatee County Sheriff's Office was no different. After initially deploying private sector-specific software, it realized the technology was not well-equipped to handle the nuances of the public sector. An audit helped the team realize the gaps



it could not fill. For example, the system was not automatically updated when employee information changed, so employee payroll information, evaluation schedules and future promotional actions had to be updated by hand.

2. Determine the needs of supervisors and employees. An audit of the software system showed the obvious gaps in manual vs. automated workflows; however, no input is as valuable as the supervisors and employees in an agency. The HR team held roundtables with employees at all levels to learn about what they needed in preparation for an overhaul of their performance management system.

#### **EMBRACING A TECH-FORWARD APPROACH**

After identifying its specific needs, the HR team evaluated and chose a public sector-specific software system that could accommodate these nuances and simplify its performance management processes. By doing so, the HR team eliminated outdated spreadsheets and paper forms, encouraged ongoing communication, and leveraged automation to enhance efficiency.

1. Eliminate outdated practices: By moving away from the private sector-specific software system

that required extensive workarounds, the HR team eliminated dependency on spreadsheets and paper forms, streamlining operations and reducing the administrative burden.

- **2. Encourage ongoing communication:** The new system emphasizes continuous communication between employees and managers to boost morale and foster success. This culture of ongoing feedback and collaboration enables individuals to receive timely, relevant quidance and support.
- **3.** Leverage automation: By leveraging automation, the HR department significantly enhanced efficiency. The new system automates routine tasks and customizable workflows, providing HR professionals with more time to focus on strategic initiatives and employee development.

The transformed approach to performance management has saved the sheriff's office more than 2,100 hours of manual HR work, boosted evaluation completion rates by 30%, and given employees and managers alike a more meaningful way to collaborate and grow.

Additionally, the transparency and visibility provided by this approach has fostered a more collaborative environment. Employees and managers now have a clearer understanding of performance expectations and can work together more effectively to achieve their goals.

In the public sector, accreditation is always top of mind. In addition to enhanced efficiencies, the HR team can now rest assured that accreditation requirements are met with the accountability and consistency of performance evaluation processes and ensure all employee information is always up to date.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

As Manatee County continues to grow, the sheriff's office is now well-equipped to handle the evolving needs of its community. The improved performance management system provides a solid foundation for ongoing development and improvement.

By staying ahead of the curve and embracing a techforward approach, the agency is poised to better service its employees and its community and maintain its commitment to excellence in public service.



Source- https://nbaa.com/ , News, First published Aug 16, 2024

Leadership Series Part 2: Addressing Leadership in a Small Flight Department; Striving for Excellence called upon business aviation industry experts Jenny Showalter, founder and chief motivational officer at Showalter Business Aviation Career Coaching, and Jim Lara, founder of Gray Stone Advisors, to explore the nuanced challenges of leadership specific to small flight departments. The panelists, moderated by Dylan Miller, Challenger 604 captain and co-chair of NBAA's Small Flight Department Subcommittee, shared practical strategies and empowering leadership practices aimed at achieving excellence

in operational efficiency and team cohesion.

Often, small flight department leaders just happen into the role, whether by convenience or seniority, panelists said. "Instead of looking at seniority, as an industry we need to start teaching leadership skills and developing people into leadership positions," said Showalter.

### SHOWALTER ALSO SHARED HOW EXPECTATIONS OF A LEADER ARE CHANGING.

"People today want an empathetic leader," she said. "They look for leaders who understand their whole



self, not just their working self. Especially in business aviation with such demanding roles, both in terms of time and expertise, it's important that leaders understand what's going on with their team in the rest of their lives."

This session follows Part 1: Becoming a Great Leader, which shared principles of effective leadership: vision, integrity and adaptability. In that session, panelists shared strategies to cultivate a culture of safety within teams of any size and explored the nuances of leadership dynamics in diverse work environments.

Those who complete all sessions of the Small

Operator Learning Series are eligible for Certified Aviation Manager (CAM) credits toward application or recertification.

The "Navigating Leadership in a Small Flight Department" series will culminate in a live, interactive session taking place prior to the 2024 NBAA Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition (NBAA-BACE), providing attendees of the Oct. 21 Small Operator Symposium with a unique opportunity to connect with industry experts in-person. Learn more about the symposium.

Source- https://nbaa.org, News, First published Aug 24, 2024

Looking toward the final quarter of what has already been a very interesting year, an Aug. 21 NBAA Thought Leadership webinar examined what we might expect for business aircraft sales and industry growth for the remainder of 2024.

Sponsored by Mesinger Jet Sales, "What Floats the Boats and Keeps Their Sales into the Wind?" examined past trends and current realities. For example, while "things tend to be slow in an election year cycle, with [buyers] sitting on the fence," moderator Jay Mesinger said 2024 is shaping up to defy conventional wisdom.

Jetcraft CEO Chad Anderson agreed. While sales have declined from the peaks of 2021-2022, "supply [of aircraft] has climbed and that's exactly what we needed," he said. "We finally have a balance of supply that our clients can logically select from."

"We were acutely aware in June that summer was upon us, but it made an abrupt turn in July," added OGARAJETS President and CEO Johnny Foster. "We're very bullish as we roll into Q4."

Lagging factors do remain, however. Panelists cited continued supply chain issues and the lack of available slots at maintenance facilities for pre-buy inspections.

#### VIEW THE RECORDED NBAA THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WEBINAR

"We're seeing more and more creative solutions," said Brian Proctor, president and CEO of Mente Group LLC. "We see it on scheduling, we see it on procurement, we see it on maintenance." That may include guaranteed spare parts inventories as a stipulation in purchase contracts.

Anderson noted buyers may also look to a non-manufacturer maintenance provider or going outside the country. "Most buyers prefer a U.S. pre-buy," he said, "but there are quality facilities outside the borders of the Americas. It will cost more, but [the pre-buy] can typically get done much quicker."

Despite the uncertainties surrounding the

## WHAT WILL THE REMAINDER BUSINESS AIRCRAFT SALES



presidential election, panelists cited other factors weighing more heavily on purchase decisions. "Interest rates are the biggest change we've seen from an inventory perspective," Proctor said. "There's a significant delta between where we were four years ago and where we are today."

"This industry today is significantly more complicated than it was five years ago, and certainly more than



10 years ago," Foster added, pointing to new FAA and IRS regulations impacting the industry, as well as decreases to bonus depreciation in 2025.

NBAA President and CEO Ed Bolen thanked the panelists for their views on the "exciting" year underway, adding that prospective aircraft buyers can gain additional purchasing guidance and information at the NBAA Business Aviation Convention &

Exhibition (NBAA-BACE), coming to Las Vegas, from Oct. 22-24.

"We will celebrate all things business aviation, put buyers and sellers together, show the technologies and meet with all the government officials," he said. "We'll inspire people and fire imaginations."



## city view

















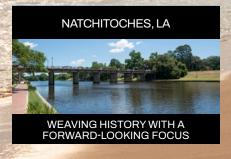




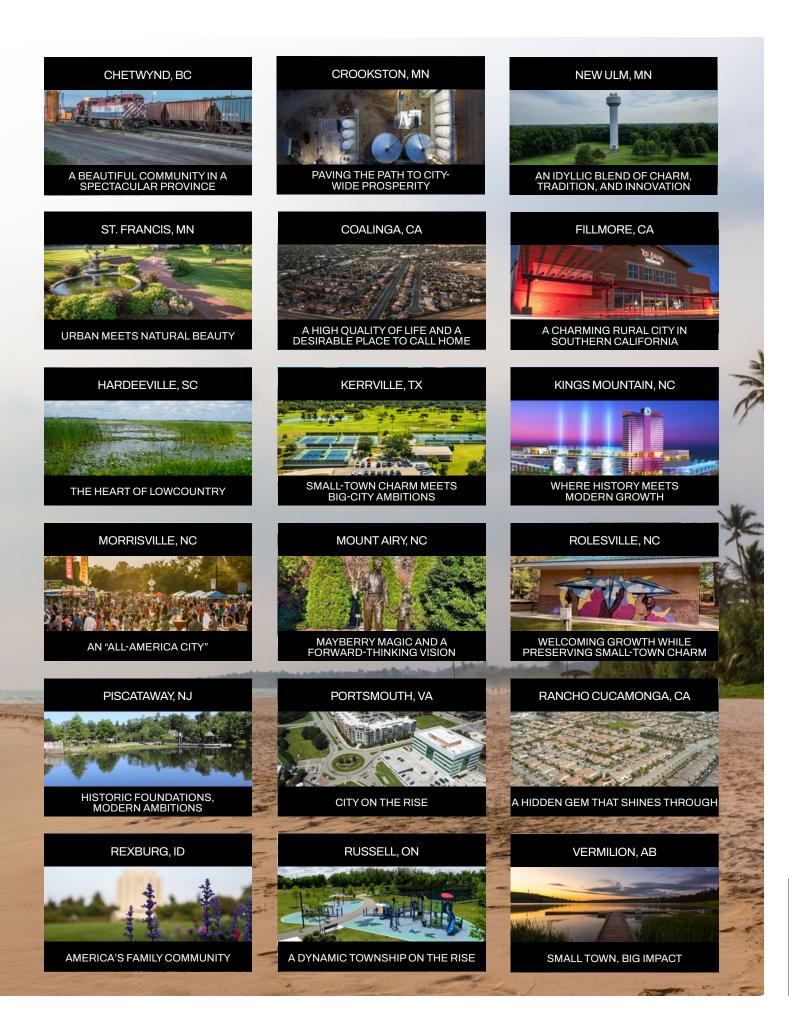












ANDOVER, KS

## COMMUNITY OF

INNOVATION AND RESIDENT-FOCUS IS SPRING BOARD



#### AT A GLANCE

#### ANDOVER, KS

**WHAT:** A rapidly growing suburban city in Butler County known for its excellent

educational system, family-friendly community, and proximity to Wichita.

WHERE: In the south-central part of Kansas, sharing its western border with

Wichita, the largest city in the state.

**WEBSITE:** www.andoverks.com

## 

ING THIS COMMUNITY TOWARDS A BRIGHT FUTURE



ndover, Kansas, is experiencing a surge of development and innovation. City leaders, including Mayor Ronnie Price, Assistant City Administrator Jolene Graham, Public Information Officer Megan Schapaugh, and Andover Area Chamber of Commerce President Lori Cullum, tirelessly work to improve the community's infrastructure and amenities. The commitment to creating a vibrant and welcoming environment for

residents and businesses is evident in every project and initiative underway.

#### **VIBRANT COMMUNITY HUB**

The Heritage Park Plaza embodies Andover's dedication to establishing community spaces encouraging social interaction and enjoyment. The city recently marked the park's grand opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the unveiling of the Heritage Man sculpture. Mayor Ronnie Price expressed his excitement about the project, particularly noting the return of Livingston's Cafe. "Livingston's, a beloved Andover original, is making a comeback. We're also in discussions with other excellent dining establishments about adding new restaurants in the next year," he announces.

Graham elaborates on the Skyloft apartments, a key element of the Heritage development. "The Skyloft apartments are resort-style, featuring a rooftop pool, communal grilling, patio areas, and spacious layouts designed to foster a vibrant community," she says. The 100-acre development includes water features and walking trails, creating a picturesque setting for residents. Plans include a senior living facility, a hotel, and additional commercial spaces, enhancing the development's appeal.

The Heritage development also includes a linear city park stretching from Heritage Park Plaza to Douglas. Graham emphasizes its role in providing a serene environment for relaxation. "Ponds, trails, and plaza areas create a natural gathering spot for our community," she explains.

#### STATE-OF-THE-ART RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The re-imagined 13th Street Sports Park is another jewel in Andover's crown. Set to open late-summer, the facility boasts five recreational ball diamonds, a splash pad, pickleball courts, sand volleyball, and more. Mayor Price highlights the park's role in connecting the community through various transportation options, including walking trails and sidewalks. "This park is designed to create a lot of good times for both the Andover community and visitors from surrounding areas," he states.

Graham adds, "The 13th Street Sports Park was







thoughtfully designed to allow families to monitor multiple activities simultaneously. Whether you're watching a ball game or your children playing on the playground, it's all about family-friendly, engaging spaces."

The park's features are tailored to enhance the recreational experience for all age groups. The unique 40 feet tall "Luckey Climber", splash pad, and half-court basketball area are just a few attractions encouraging physical activity and outdoor fun. Additionally, the park includes a walking trail that circles the entire area, providing a scenic route for joggers, walkers, and cyclists alike.

#### FIRE STATIONS FOR ENHANCED SAFETY

The city recently opened Fire Station 2, a state-of-the-art facility designed with firefighter health and safety in mind. Graham describes its advanced features: "From lighting and sleeping arrangements to decontamination areas, every aspect is designed with the health of our firefighters in mind; especially to reduce the risk of cancer and other occupational

hazards for our firefighters." The station will also include community-friendly amenities such as a playground and meeting spaces, fostering stronger ties between the fire department and residents.

In addition to Fire Station 2, the city has also invested in remodeling Fire Station 1. Mayor Price adds, "The addition of decontamination areas ensures that firefighters can change into fresh clothes, preventing contamination throughout the station. Fire Station 2's strategic location also allows us to respond to emergencies within four minutes, a critical factor in life-saving situations."

#### INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Andover's infrastructure projects are pivotal to supporting its growth. The expansion of Kellogg (US 54-400) to a six-lane freeway is a major undertaking, with Phase 2 recently greenlit. This project aims to alleviate traffic congestion and improve connectivity within the city and to surrounding areas. The city plans to develop backage roads to enhance safety and accessibility during the freeway expansion.



"The Kellogg expansion will stretch from 159th to the east side of Andover on Prairie Creek Road. This alleviates peak-time traffic congestion, benefiting both residents and commuters. Additionally, our wastewater treatment plant's \$40 million expansion is crucial for supporting residential and commercial growth," Graham notes.

Developing backage roads is a strategic move to ensure smooth traffic flow and enhance safety. Mayor Price explains, "These new backage roads will act as a safety corridor, ensuring efficient traffic management during construction and beyond."

#### DYNAMIC BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM

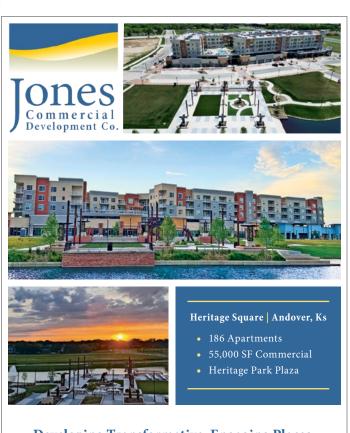
The Andover Area Chamber of Commerce is important in supporting and attracting existing businesses. Cullum emphasizes the chamber's efforts in fostering a connected and collaborative business community. "Our business community is a community. They want to be connected and support each other constantly," she says.

Mayor Price highlights various incentives for businesses, such as industrial revenue bonds and the neighborhood revitalization program, making Andover an attractive investment place. "We're thinking outside the box on many things," he states. "It's not just about retail and commercial; we've recently worked with developers on a shipping and receiving logistics park, and unique projects along the Redbud Trail including a restaurant and a "Glamping" venue, as well as other diverse projects that will benefit our community."

Graham adds that Andover's quality of life amenities, including parks, an amphitheater, and extensive trails, make it an appealing location for residents and businesses. "Our investment in quality of life is attractive to employers because they can offer their employees a great place to live, work, and play," she says.

#### **COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS**

Andover is known for its vibrant community events that bring residents together. Schapaugh details



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several annual events that draw residents and visitors alike. Greater Andover Days, the city's largest festival, features a carnival, food trucks, concerts, and fireworks, attracting nearly 5,000 attendees. Other notable events include the Hometown Christmas celebration, Police and Fire Community Cookout, and the Chamber of Commerce's annual city-wide garage sale.

Mayor Price speaks about the community's enthusiasm for these events. "The parade during Greater Andover Days is always packed, and we're excited to see people coming together to celebrate our city," he says. "We've also contracted ASM to manage our Amphitheater, ensuring top-notch entertainment for our residents."

The city's commitment to community engagement is evident in the range of events and activities. From family-friendly festivals to educational programs like the Citizens Police Academy, Andover ensures something for everyone. The Citizens Police Academy, in particular, provides residents with a behind-thescenes look at the department's operations, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of law enforcement.

#### **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

Looking ahead, Andover's strategic goals focus on completing major infrastructure projects and enhancing community amenities. Graham discusses the plans for a new activity center within the 13th Street Sports Park, offering expanded recreational programs. "The new activity center will bring many new recreational opportunities to our community," she notes. "We're very excited about the designs and concepts, which will be developed in the next few years.

The city also anticipates opening new senior living facilities and an apartment complex, further supporting its growth. "We have a senior living facility being built between Dillon's and Sunstone apartments," Mayor Price says. "Additionally, we're looking at a new apartment complex with around 245 units on US 54-400 at Onewood."

Graham accentuates the importance of these developments in supporting the city's long-term



growth. "Our focus is on creating a sustainable, vibrant community that meets the needs of all our residents," she says. "From infrastructure improvements to new housing options, we're committed to making Andover a premier suburb of Wichita."

#### **EMPOWERING BUSINESS CONNECTIONS**

Cullum notes that Andover's businesses are deeply committed to giving back to the community. Andover



Auto Body, K. Westphal Jewelers, Andover State Bank, Domino's, and many others consistently support local events and initiatives. Cullum explains, "Our businesses are very focused on giving back, whether through donations to the chamber, sponsoring city events, or supporting the community in other ways."

Schapaugh adds, "Capitol Federal Bank sponsors our amphitheater, and many businesses support

our major events like Greater Andover Days and Hometown Christmas. Their contributions are vital to our community's success."

Mayor Price stresses the collaborative efforts between the city and the business community. "We work closely with businesses to create a supportive environment," he says. "Our relationship with the Heritage Development team has been phenomenal,



and we're always looking for ways to improve and attract new businesses."

The Chamber of Commerce offers a range of resources, from networking events to financing assistance, ensuring that businesses have the support they need to thrive. Cullum emphasizes the Chamber's role in connecting businesses with the community. "We believe in making business fun and stress-free," she proudly states. "Our goal is to create a supportive, enjoyable environment for all our members."

#### EMBRACING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The city's proactive approach to development is evident in its strategic planning and execution. Andover is focused on creating a well-rounded, thriving community, from major infrastructure projects to community events. The recent announcement of a QuikTrip in the Heritage and Yorktown corridor is another example of the city's efforts to attract popular businesses and enhance local amenities.

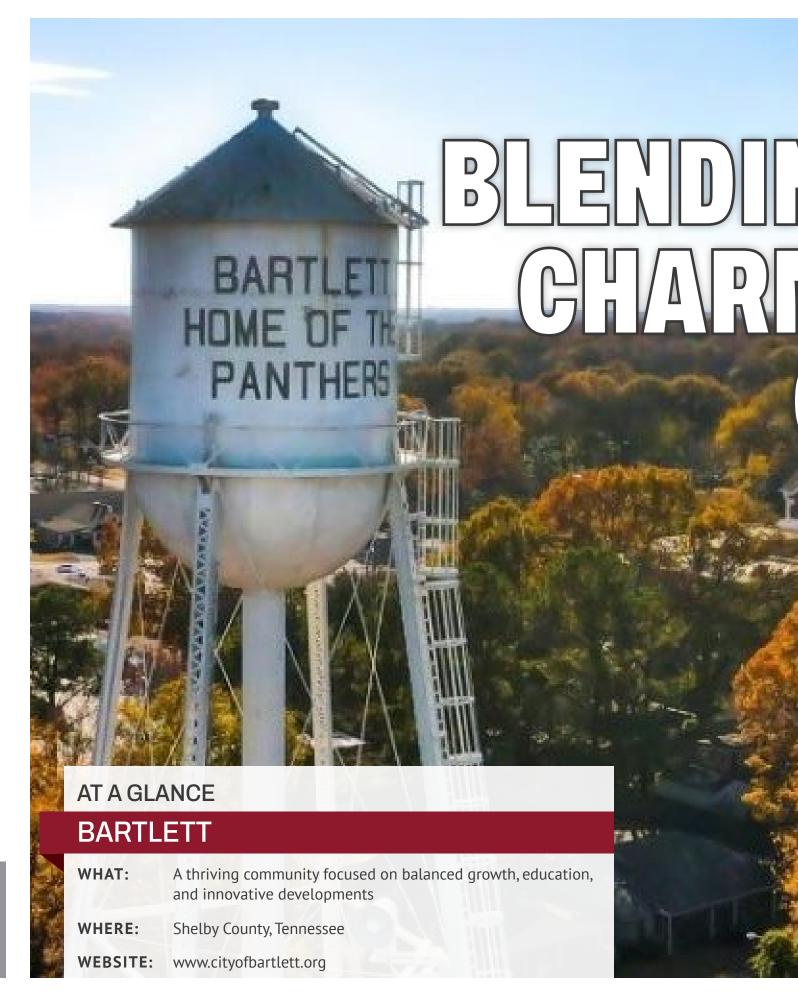


Andover, Kansas is a city on the rise, driven by thoughtful planning and a strong sense of community. The city is well-equipped to support its growing population with major developments like the Heritage Park Plaza, 13th Street Sports Park, and new fire station. The proactive efforts of city leaders and the Chamber of Commerce ensure that Andover remains a desirable place to live, work, and play. As Andover continues to expand and evolve, it stands as a model of community-driven progress and innovation.

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

**■** Jones Commercial Development

www.jonescommercialdevelopment.com Jones Commercial Development Company (JCDC) collaborates with private investors and the public sector to deliver market driven projects that are transformative and engaging for the communities in which they are developed. JCDC projects span a variety of categories including: suburban mixed-use, urban mixed-use, retail, entertainment, adaptive re-use and in-fill residential.



BARTLETT, TN

# IGSMALL-TOWN MMTHBIG-GITY OPPORTURIES

Preparing for future growth with innovative developments, robust education programs, and a community-focused vision.

artlett, Tennessee, offers a unique blend of small-town charm and urban opportunities. As Mayor David Parsons explains, "We're centrally located in Shelby County and are the largest municipality outside of Memphis. We began as an old railroad town, originally named Union Depot, before becoming Bartlett." This rich history forms the bedrock of the community's pride, encapsulated in their motto, "Hometown Proud."

"People often describe Bartlett as having a small-town feel with big-city opportunities," Mayor Parsons continues. This duality is evident in the amenities Bartlett offers. Despite its modest size, the town boasts police and fire departments, ambulances, and an impressive array of parks—29 in total. These parks are more than just green spaces; they are integral to the community's quality of life, emphasizing how the town maintains a balance between growth and a close-knit community atmosphere.

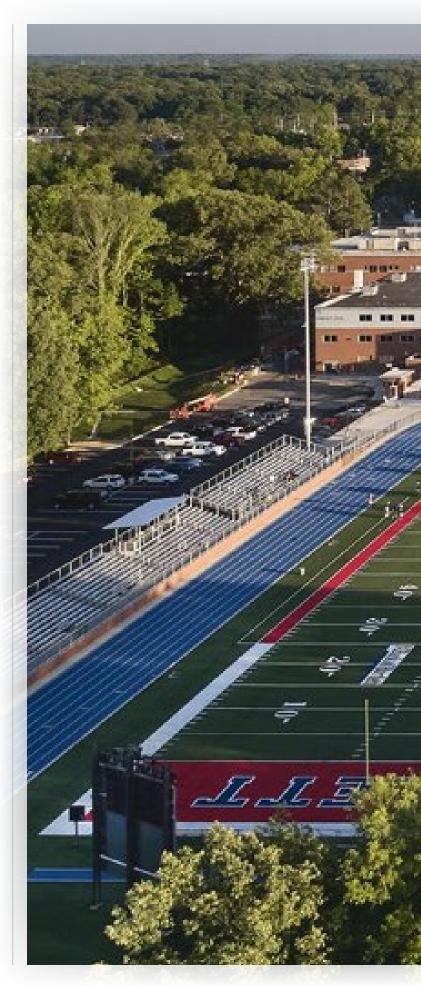
Living in Bartlett means enjoying the best of both worlds. Mayor Parsons elaborates, "You can still get employment in the big towns and enjoy amenities they bring, such as the Liberty Bowl and Beale Street, but come home to a tranquil, safe community." A strong sense of heritage and community complements this tranquility. "You go to church on Sundays, and you're sitting beside neighbors who have raised their families here," he adds. This tight-knit atmosphere and modern conveniences make Bartlett an ideal place to live and raise a family.

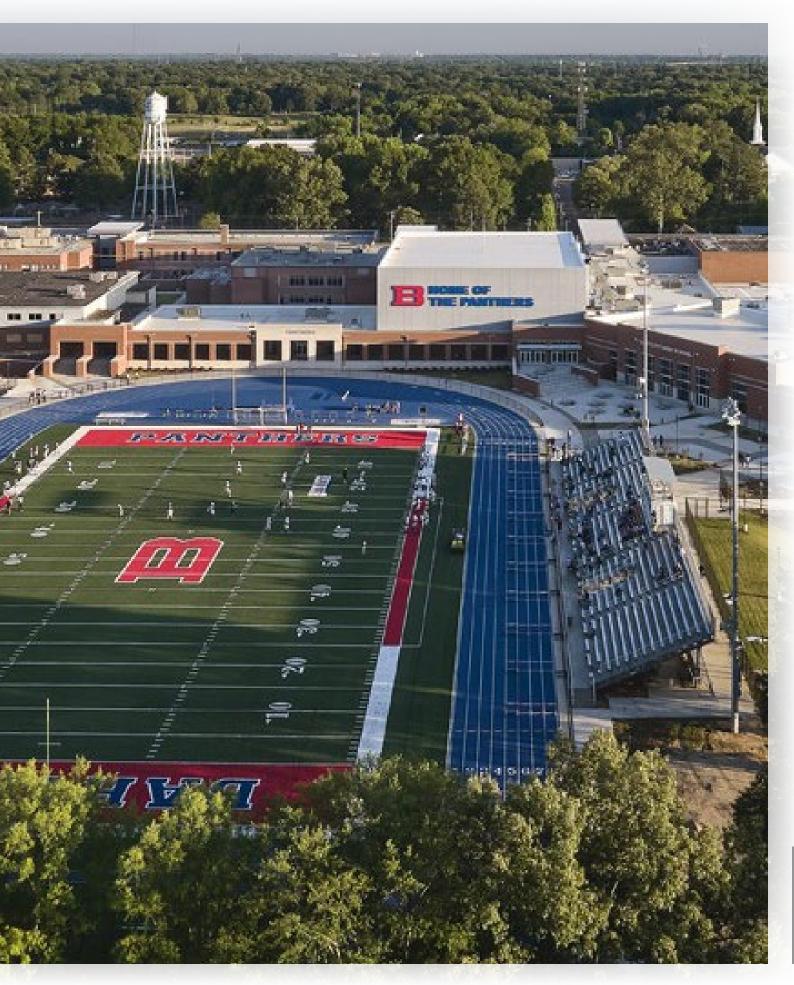
#### **BARTLETT'S EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Education is a cornerstone of Bartlett, and Mayor Parsons eagerly highlights the town's achievements in this area. "We were part of the Shelby County school system for a long time. This is our 10th anniversary of having our municipal school system," he remarks. Establishing control over local education has allowed Bartlett to shape its future more directly.

"You can't talk about true quality of life without mentioning schools," he asserts. Bartlett High School, a historical fixture in the community, symbolizes this. The school has been a cornerstone since the city's early days, serving around 9,000 students across 11 buildings. As the mayor notes, this local control is crucial: "We have a hands-on approach to what we want the product to be in the future."

One key to Bartlett's educational success has been hiring exemplary leadership. Mayor Parsons speaks highly of Dr. David Stephens, the Superintendent of Bartlett City Schools. "One of the first things we had to do was to elect a school board and then hire the right person to lead and guide that ship," he says. This leadership is instrumental as the community prepares for significant investments, such as the





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#### **BIG BANK REACH. SMALL BANK ROOTS.**

How First Horizon is investing in the Bartlett community.

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A great example of this is happening right here in Bartlett. Two of First Horizon's leaders, Senior Private Client Relationship Manager Jaime Deal and Banking Center Manager Heather Nash are honored to support their community through both their personal and professional endeavors. To them, giving back helps Bartlett get ahead in so many meaningful ways.

Jaime has lived and worked in Bartlett for 20 years. Her sons attend Bartlett schools, and she currently serves on the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, participates in city events like the Bartlett Expo, volunteers at the 4th of July Parade, and helps plan and coordinate the Bartlett Police Charitable Foundation 5K Run/Walk. People are at the heart of everything she does, from helping them better understand their investment options to improving their academic opportunities through the Bartlett Education Foundation.

Similarly, Heather is constantly devoting her time and efforts to making our great city even better, whether it's through coordinating blood drives; serving on the Board for the Bartlett, Arlington and Lakeland Donor Council; giving her time to the Bartlett Police Charitable Foundation; or providing essential food items for our firefighters. She regularly volunteers at local businesses, promoting financial literacy and helping people improve and empower their lives through budgeting and saving. Her hope is to one day share this important information with Bartlett's future generations, too, through school programs.

Jaime, Heather and the entire Bartlett Banking Center staff are honored that their workplace shares their philanthropical mindset. First Horizon Bank proudly sponsors the Bartlett Station Farmers' Market Kids Zone table, the annual St. Ann's Golf Tournament and the quarterly Staying Ahead of the Curve mentoring workshop for local business owners. You can find employees pitching in at local events, speaking at school Career Days and even hosting regular food trucks on site for clients and guests.

If you'd like to learn more about how Jamie, Heather and First Horizon are putting their big bank muscle and small bank hustle to work for the Bartlett community, please stop by the banking center.

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VIL AND MUNICIPAL

nearly \$6 billion in Blue Oval City, just 25 minutes away.

Mayor Parsons also emphasizes the interconnectedness of education and the local economy. "People seeking employment at Blue Oval City, Ford's latest creation, are looking for a safe city with a good school system," he explains. Bartlett's school programs are designed to meet these expectations. The town's approach includes initiatives like the high school internship program, which started in his second year as mayor. This summer program places six to eight students in hands-on roles within the fire department, code enforcement, planning, performing arts, parks and public relations sectors, providing real-world experience.

#### **BRIDGING SCHOOLS AND INDUSTRY**

Dr. Stephens emphasizes a balanced educational

approach tailored to the diverse future paths of students. "We know many of our students will go on to a four-year university, but we also know many of them will go straight from Bartlett High School into the workforce," he says. This awareness has driven the creation of 17 career technical education (CTE) pathways, ranging from advanced manufacturing and coding to cybersecurity, digital design, health sciences, mechatronics, transportation, and culinary arts.

"We want to ensure our students have a wide array of opportunities," Dr. Stephens asserts. The district also offers 17 Advanced Placement and Honors courses and 13 dual credit enrollment courses, enabling students to earn college credits from institutions like the University of Memphis and Southwest Tennessee Community College. Collaboration with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology is also





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Avenu Insights & Analytics partnered with the City of Bartlett to manage their first stand-alone library. After six months of preparations, the library opened on July 1st. Pre-launch activities included training sessions with Mayor David Parsons, City officials, the libraries technology team, and the Friends of the Library volunteer group.

Managed by Avenu, in partnership with the City of Bartlett, the library offers books, audiobooks, DVDs, CDs, and magazines. Any local resident or property owner can receive a free library card, and non-residents may also be eligible for free or discounted library cards.

The library also offers 20 public computers (featuring internet access, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel). In addition, free Wi-Fi is also available for patrons bringing their own personal devices.

Residents wanting to utilize the library, but unable to make it on-site, can access their account, renew books, place holds on materials, and use library catalogs and databases on-line, 24/7.

Each Wednesday, story times are held. Sessions are broken up by age (0-24 months and 2-5 years old) and library's Facebook page is often updated with pictures of children enjoying a story with their peers and caregivers.

This partnership with Avenu has already provided the City of Bartlett, and its library patrons, many happy returns.



key for those pursuing technical careers.

Bartlett's proximity to major industrial hubs has spurred innovative educational programs. When Ford announced its Blue Oval City project near Bartlett, the school district responded proactively. "We've been to Dearborn, Michigan to understand what Ford needs and have aligned our curriculum accordingly," Dr. Stephens explains. This alignment ensures students are well-prepared for careers right after high school, whether at Medtronic, Titan Medical, Engineered Medical Systems, or similar companies.

"Our students in the advanced manufacturing program use the same machinery found in the industry," says Stephens. They gain hands-on experience with Haas CNC machines in a replica clean room, making them job-ready upon graduation. These students can earn college credits while still in high school and transition smoothly into well-paying jobs, further solidifying their roots in the Bartlett community.

Collaboration extends beyond manufacturing. "Our nursing students have great opportunities at Saint Francis Hospital," Dr. Stephens points out while



highlighting successful externships for faculty at major companies like FedEx, AutoZone, and International Paper. This exposure starts as early as junior high, helping students discover their interests and potential career paths before they reach high school. In addition, Bartlett's partnership with Steve Wozniak's Woz Ed STEM Pathway District supports this early exposure even in their elementary schools.

# BARTLETT'S DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

Mayor Parsons discusses Bartlett's approach to development and infrastructure, including one of

the town's most significant mixed-use projects. As he details, this project includes single-family homes, condos, commercial space, and lofts. However, infrastructure challenges like the sewer system have posed difficulties.

"We've looked at ways and resources to fund those and identify those problems," he says, expressing optimism about Bartlett's bright future. The town's proactive stance is further evidenced by establishing an industrial development park in the 1980s, which now houses numerous job opportunities.

With the recent annexation of about 350 acres in the northwest sector, Innovation Park, Bartlett continues to prepare for future growth. With the potential to expand by another 600 acres, this area is poised to attract technical and automotive robotics jobs, diversifying employment opportunities. "We're trying to prepare for the future to ensure continued job growth in Bartlett," Mayor Parsons emphasizes.

Moreover, Bartlett contributes significantly to Shelby





County's GDP, with an impact of almost \$8.3 billion. "We have a good workforce in this community," he notes, highlighting the diverse mix of white-collar and blue-collar jobs. This economic strength underpins Bartlett's strategy to evolve its infrastructure and community services to meet modern demands.

# UNION DEPOT: BARTLETT'S CENTERPIECE

Keith Grant, a real estate developer with deep roots in the Bartlett community, shares insights into the transformative Union Depot project. This mixed-use development signifies a pivotal moment in Bartlett's growth, reflecting the town's rich history and forward-looking vision.

"Our family's been building in the Bartlett community for over 50 years," he states proudly. This long-standing presence has given them a unique perspective on the town's evolution from a small community to the vibrant place it is today. "We have a mixture of blue-collar and white-collar workers, but

you just have an outstanding community feel when you're in Bartlett," he adds, highlighting the town's inclusive and welcoming atmosphere.

Keith explains that the Union Depot project is a \$160 million development incorporating various residential and commercial spaces. "When we had the opportunity to acquire the property where Union Depot is today, we jumped at it," he says. With the foresight of Bartlett's leadership, a special mixed-use permit was explicitly developed for this property, allowing a blend of commercial spaces with lofts, flats, townhomes, and patio homes.

The construction timeline for Union Depot is ambitious yet transparent. "We'll have tenants starting to move in there in December of this year," Keith outlines. Townhomes will be available for sale starting in January next year, with construction beginning simultaneously. The single-family home subdivision is also progressing, with homes expected

to start construction in April next year.

# BARTLETT'S PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Mayor Parsons then illuminates Bartlett's strategic efforts to improve its parks and recreation facilities, emphasizing how the town is enhancing residents' quality of life. Although Bartlett boasts 29 parks, including W.J. Freeman Park, the largest at approximately 85 acres, Mayor Parsons notes a growing desire among residents for more amenities closer to their homes.

The town introduced the innovative "Rec Rover" program to address this. "Instead of having to go to our main park, we bring activities to local community parks," he says. This program features inflatable slides, bounce houses, and plans for fitness classes, making recreational activities more accessible to residents.

Residents also expressed a desire for more outdoor experiences. Responding to this, Bartlett launched Food Truck Fridays and Bartlett LIVE. "We had a large turnout for our last Food Truck Friday," Mayor

Parsons reveals, describing the scene of families enjoying food and community spirit. Bartlett LIVE, featuring local bands and food trucks on Saturday nights, further enriches the town's social offerings. "Residents have the option to either bring their own meal or purchase from food trucks while enjoying live music, all at no cost," he adds.

Adapting to changing recreational trends is another focus of the master plan. "Tennis courts are not being used as much; pickleball is very hot right now," the mayor observes. The town is modifying existing tennis courts to accommodate pickleball, reflecting the evolving interests of the community. Upgrading playgrounds to be accessible for children with diverse needs is also a priority.

# PREPARING FOR GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

As 2024 enters the year's second half, Mayor Parsons outlines Bartlett's top priorities for the next 18 months, including the town's proactive approach to meeting the demands of impending economic developments.



# 

"Our top priority is meeting the housing demands that the new Blue Oval City Ford plant will create," Mayor Parsons asserts. Blue Oval is set to begin rolling out all-electric F-150 vehicles by late next year, and the influx of workers will necessitate expanded housing, dining, and lodging options. "We've been to Dearborn multiple times, always asking, 'What can we do to assist you?' Their response is consistently threefold: housing, restaurants, and hotels," he explains.

To facilitate this growth, Bartlett has identified and is preparing large areas for residential development. "We've lowered many of our impact and development fees to encourage growth," he notes. The town also focuses on enhancing its sewer infrastructure, particularly in the industrial park area. "We've poured money and resources into studies to ensure we can provide essential services like sewer systems," he adds, highlighting the often overlooked but critical aspects of urban planning.

In addition to housing and infrastructure, Bartlett is targeting commercial growth. "We're trying to attract



different grocery chains and businesses," Mayor Parsons says, pointing out that they have already identified about 400 acres for potential development. Collaborating closely with developers, the town aims to stay ahead of the curve in providing necessary infrastructure and support. "We've had some Fortune 500 companies showing interest," he reveals.

Mayor Parsons highlights how the town works with prospective businesses, citing efforts to bring in



significant retailers like Hy-Vee. "We have big ideas and places for many of those things to come in," he says. Bartlett aims to be the most cooperative and forward-thinking town in West Tennessee, ready to meet new businesses' objectives and ensure its residents' thriving future. "They will not find another town in West Tennessee that will work with them, try to meet their objectives, and provide the city services like Bartlett, Tennessee does," the mayor concludes.

# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ First Horizon Bank

# www.firsthorizon.com

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# ■ Avenu Insights and Analytics

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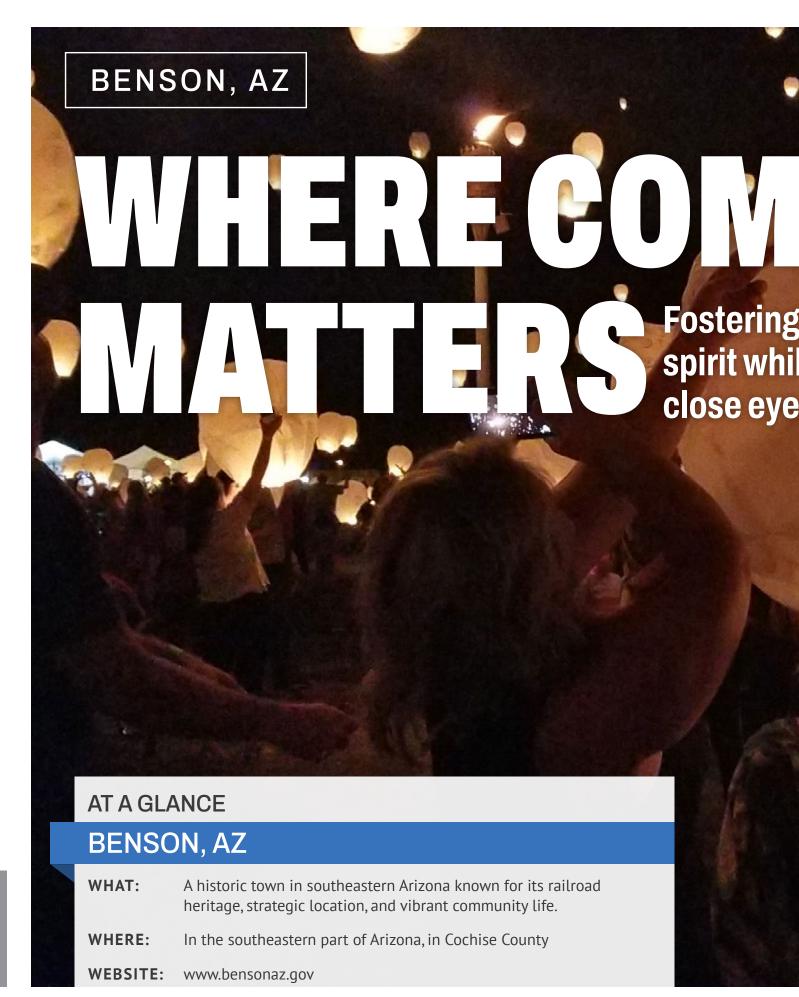
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# ■ Brim's Snack Foods

# www.brimsnacks.com

In the 70s, Terry Brimhall began selling pork rinds in Bartlett. Since then, he and his wife Becki have grown the company to national snack company and produce a variety quality snacks like cheese puffs and popcorn. Today, the Brimhall family still proudly has the national headquarters in Bartlett.





In Benson, everyone looks out for each other. The cohesive community rallies together in times of need and celebration alike. Vicki Vivian, City Manager, shares her journey from growing up in a small town to falling in love with Benson's unique blend of amenities and community. "I grew up in a very small town, swore I'd never live in a small town again, and now I can't imagine leaving Benson," she proudly shares.

A poignant example of Benson's community spirit occurred when the local high school football team made it to the state championships. Within an hour and a half of launching a GoFundMe campaign, the town had raised enough money to charter a bus for the team. "Everyone lined up on both sides of Main Street with flags and signs to see them off," Vivian recalls. The collective pride and support are what help define Benson.

# **GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Despite its small size, Benson is experiencing significant growth and development that many towns would envy. Mayor Konrad highlights the town's geographical advantages, including its climate and location, which make it an attractive place to live. The new Maverik station is a notable development highlighting Benson's strategic importance along I-10. "When you see a major company like Maverik choosing Benson, it speaks volumes about our location," Konrad says. The development brings essential tax revenue with minimal impact on local infrastructure.

The town also invests in extensive park improvements, funded through grants and bonds. "We're looking at over \$2 million in park improvements," Vivian notes. The enhancements include new softball fields, a splash pad, and playground equipment to provide residents with better recreational facilities and attract visitors.

# HISTORICAL ROOTS AND **MODERN ENHANCEMENTS**

Benson's historical identity as a pivotal railroad town is not just a relic of the past but a dynamic part of its present and future. As an essential stop on the Amtrak Sunset Limited route, Benson has revitalized







its railroad heritage by constructing a new, fully accessible Amtrak rail platform.

"Benson's connection to the Sunset Limited route is a testament to our enduring ties to the railroad industry," Konrad explains, highlighting how the enhancement preserves Benson's rich history while embracing modern accessibility standards.

The town's efforts to enhance its historical appeal extend beyond transportation. Benson has actively preserved and celebrated its railroad history through local museums and community events, engaging residents and visitors in its unique heritage. The initiatives enrich the community's cultural fabric and attract tourism, bolstering local businesses and

economic development.

Benson's economy thrives through strategic partnerships with significant community partners such as the Arizona G&T Cooperative (formerly Arizona Electric Power Cooperative) and Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative. The cooperatives play large roles in generating and distributing electric power across the region, employing hundreds of residents and bolstering Benson's economic landscape.

#### ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESS

Benson pursues economic growth and sustainability through strategic initiatives to attract and retain businesses. The town's streamlined approach to building permits and inspections is central to these efforts. "We've simplified the process to ensure businesses can start operations quickly and efficiently," Vivian explains, highlighting the town's dedication to reducing bureaucratic obstacles.

The streamlined process has earned praise from local businesses and national chains alike, including Maverik and Love's, who appreciate Benson's responsiveness and support for business development. Additionally, Benson collaborates closely with the Southeast Arizona Economic Development Group, leveraging their expertise to connect businesses with resources and navigate regulatory landscapes effectively.

The partnership with the Economic Development Group has proven instrumental in fostering a business-friendly environment in Benson. Through strategic guidance and advocacy, the group helps businesses access incentives, grants, and training programs that support their growth and success. The collaborative approach attracts new businesses to Benson and cultivates a supportive ecosystem where enterprises can thrive.

# **HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION**

Health care and education are foundational pillars of Benson's community development strategy, crucial for enhancing quality of life and attracting residents and businesses alike. Benson Hospital, affiliated with TMC Healthcare, is a cornerstone of the local economy, offering advanced medical services and employment opportunities. "The state-of-the-art imaging center here in town is a significant asset for our community," Vivian remarks, highlighting the hospital's commitment to providing cuttingedge care close to home. The hospital's expansion and enhancement of services have not only met the region's healthcare needs but also positioned Benson as a regional healthcare destination.

Similarly, Chiricahua Community Health Center is fundamental in delivering comprehensive medical



services, including specialized care and community outreach programs. The facilities improve health outcomes and contribute to Benson's overall wellbeing and attractiveness as a place to live and work.

In education, the Benson Unified School District garners acclaim for its academic achievements, earning accolades such as the President's Blue Ribbon Award. The district's commitment to excellence is complemented by Cochise Community College, which has expanded its offerings to include four-year programs in response to community demand for higher education options.

#### THE LANTERN FESTIVAL

Recreational activities are abundant, with events like the Lantern Festival drawing thousands of visitors. The Lantern Festival is one of Benson's most cherished events, drawing visitors across Arizona and beyond. The festival, featuring biodegradable rice paper lanterns, allows participants to send messages to loved ones and celebrate significant life moments. The festival's emotional impact is profound, with people from various states attending and sharing deeply personal experiences.

The festival started in 2018 and grew significantly, with over 4,600 attendees last year. "It's a beautiful event that means so much to so many people," Vivian notes. The sight of thousands of lanterns ascending into the night sky, accompanied by the song "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong, is breathtaking and emotional.

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Benson's downtown district is transforming remarkably, driven by family-owned businesses. The new fuel stop, bakery, and revamped Horseshoe Restaurant are just a few examples of local entrepreneurs revitalizing the area. "It's a major transformation, and we love it," Konrad states. The reopening of Page's Palace, a historic bar, has also brought new life to the downtown scene, offering residents a local place to gather and celebrate.

The transformation is not just about aesthetics but also about fostering a vibrant community space. "We're seeing more people in downtown Benson





on a Saturday night than we have in the last 20 years," Konrad says, describing a recent event at Page's Palace. Brad Hamilton, Public Works Director, notes, "We have a lot of room for growth." Upcoming projects include road work, park expansions, and the development of multi-use fields to host sports tournaments.

One ambitious project involves developing a mountain bike park and additional multi-use fields. which could attract sports tournaments and boost local tourism. "We're looking at a mountain bike park that would draw people to Benson," Hamilton says. The project and other recreational developments aim to make Benson a destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Another significant initiative is enhancing Benson's municipal airport. The town plans to extend a road from the I-10/Highway 90 intersection to the airport, turning it into a transportation hub. "This would tie all our transportation advantages together and create a significant economic driver for the town," Konrad explains.

# **FUTURE VISION**

Looking ahead, Benson's leaders are focused on expanding recreational opportunities, enhancing infrastructure, and attracting new businesses. The town's strategic location at the convergence of major highways and its municipal airport offers significant economic potential. "We have the advantage of being a little bit remote while still connected to major transportation routes," says Konrad.

In addition to physical infrastructure, Benson is also investing in its social and cultural infrastructure. The town's focus on community events, educational infrastructure, and health care services aims to create a high quality of life for residents. As Vivian notes, "Our goal is to make Benson not just a place to live, but a place to thrive

From its supportive residents to its strategic development projects, Benson is more than just a place to live—it's a place to belong. As Mayor Konrad concludes, "Benson is the center of the universe," and for those who call it home, it truly is.





# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ City of Benson Arizona www.bensonaz.gov

BLACK DIAMOND, WA

# BALANCING GROW IN WASHINGTON'S GROWING GITY WITTER



# **BLACK DIAMOND, WASHINGTON**

**WHAT:** A small town tied to the coal mining industry, now known

for its rapid population growth, community-focused events,

and ongoing infrastructure and development projects.

WHERE: Black Diamond is located in King County, along the

Cascade Mountain range, 25 miles southeast of Seattle.

**WEBSITE:** www.blackdiamondwa.gov



town was established in the late nineteenth century as a company town for the Black Diamond Coal Company, originally based in Nortonville, California, 35 miles east of San Francisco. When coal was discovered in Washington Territory, the company dispatched a representative north to assess its potential.

The coal tested well, prompting the relocation of a crew to the homestead and the establishment of operations. The construction of a narrow-gauge rail line from Renton was the first major task to facilitate heavy machinery transport. By 1884, the mines were operational, and workers and their families were moved from California to populate the burgeoning town. Though the coal mines have long since shut down, Black Diamond continues to thrive, preserving its rich history and heritage.

# MASTER PLANNED DEVELOPMENT (MPD)

Moving forward to recent developments, Mayor Carol Benson highlights several key infrastructure projects shaping the future of Black Diamond. "We have the largest Master Planned Development (MPD) in the state of Washington, and it was approved in 2010 for 6,050 residences," she notes. Despite the economic delays, the first home was completed in 2018, and approximately 1,200 residences have been established.

One of the most significant infrastructure upgrades includes the installation of two roundabouts on Highway 169, a major state highway. The project improves traffic flow and incorporates underground stormwater vaults to protect water quality. Once completed, the main roundabout will feature a stormwater vault converted into a park with trees and benches, creating a pleasant communal space.

#### **ENHANCING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

Black Diamond is home to Lake Sawyer, the fourth-largest lake in King County. At the lake's outlet, Covington Creek, lies a weir, an important dam structure. The town recently secured a \$2.8 million grant from the flood control district to replace aging culverts with a bridge, enhancing the area's infrastructure without requiring matching funds.







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Discover the ultimate indoor playground for children! We offer unforgettable birthday party bookings, exciting camps, versatile event space, and enriching preschool classes. Join us for a fun-filled experience that your kids will love and cherish!

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We are thrilled to announce that Ash & Elm Play Studio is under new ownership with a dedicated onsite management team. Our new leadership is committed to enhancing your experience with fresh ideas and a renewed focus on providing a safe, fun, and engaging environment for your children. We understand the importance of supporting parents and families, and our new management is dedicated to offering services that give parents peace of mind and valuable time to focus on their well-being and other important personal goals.

Looking for a fun and safe place for your children to play, learn, and celebrate? Then, look no further! At Ash & Elm Play Studio, we offer a variety of exciting services designed to delight both kids and parents.

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Celebrate your child's special day with us! Our birthday party packages include exclusive use of our play area, themed decorations, a setup team, and a dedicated party host to ensure everything runs smoothly.

## **OPEN PLAY/INTERACTIVE PLAY/DROP CAMPS:**

Keep your kids engaged and active during school breaks with our fun-filled camps. Our weekly Open Play and Interactive Drop Off sessions offer a mix of educational activities, creative arts, and plenty of playtime.

## PRESCHOOL CLASSES:

Give your little ones a head start with our enriching preschool classes. Our curriculum is designed to foster confidence in both academics and social emotional skills through entertaining and engaging activities.

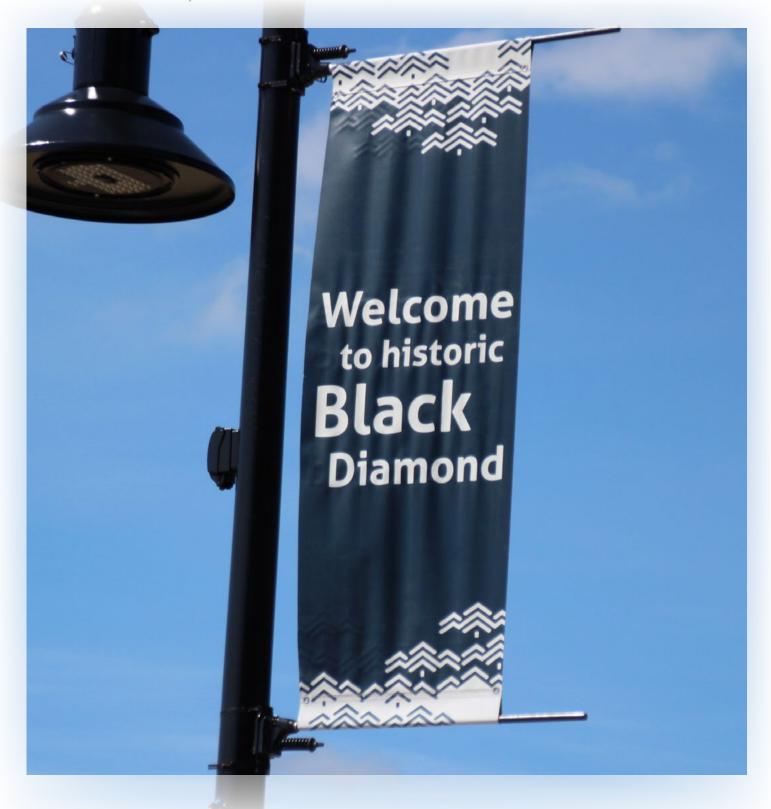
#### **EVENT SPACE:**

Need a unique venue for your next event? Our versatile event space is perfect for family gatherings, community events, parties, and more. Rent our space and enjoy a hassle-free experience with our on-site support.

# **AFFORDABILITY:**

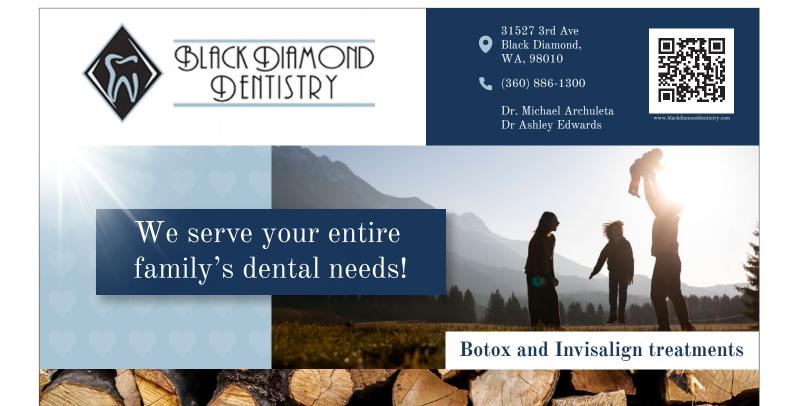
We offer pocket-friendly prices, along with great membership options, featuring freebies, perks, and fun giveaways for families.

Join the Ash & Elm Play Studio family today and experience the joy of a vibrant, engaging environment where children can play, learn, and grow.



Additionally, the town has a historically significant spring water source, initially developed by miners. The source is undergoing upgrades, funded by developers who will receive future credits for water infrastructure improvements. The upgrades include new pumps and piping to ensure a reliable water supply.

Another exciting project is the rebuilding of the local skate park. The original park, removed due to safety concerns, will be reconstructed with the help of grant and capital funding, with completion expected by the end of 2024. This will provide a safe and modern space for the town's youth and skating enthusiasts.



A DELTA DENTAL



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# PASSING THE TORCH

It was a sense of coziness that first hooked Dr. Michael Archuleta when he walked through the doors of Black Diamond Dentistry 2 years ago. Like a Norman Rockwell painting, the dental practice possessed a quaint nostalgia, harkening back to an era when small towns and the family-owned businesses that defined them were the heartbeat of America.

"I had previously practiced dentistry in a busy shopping district, dominated by chain stores." You start to feel like just a number in an environment like that. I wanted something different. I wanted to get to know my patients and their families, to provide care across generations and to put down roots in the community I live in. Black Diamond Dentistry was the perfect fit. I felt it as soon as I walked through the doors."

Since assuming ownership of the practice in 2022, Dr. Mike has never felt more at home. "We have the most amazing patients," he beams, "many of which know a tremendous amount about the history of Black Diamond."

The once burgeoning coal-mining town has managed to simultaneously pivot industry and retain many of its bedrock family-owned businesses - no small feat in a rapidly changing world. Dr. Mike feels honored to carry this torch forward, providing cutting-edge care with compassion. "You are never just a number, here. At Black Diamond Dentistry, we're one big family."



The town's gym, a historical structure moved from a school to city property, has seen significant upgrades. This includes a new roof funded by a grant, new handicap ramps, stairs, doors, lighting, and padding for sports activities. The gym is a multifunctional space for parties, activities, and sports events.

Environmental and recreational spaces are a key focus in Black Diamond, with the town's Master Planned Developments (MPDs) mandating that 40% of the area be dedicated to active and passive

trail systems. Ginder Creek Park, another significant project, recently received grant funding to improve community connectivity and promote a walkable environment.

# DYNAMIC HOUSING MARKET

The housing market in Black Diamond is currently in a dynamic phase, with about 100 homes in inventory and 104 new permit applications recently submitted. Although the market experienced a slowdown last year, likely due to rising interest rates, buyers are



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beginning to adjust. Compared to historical rates, current interest rates are relatively moderate. The market has seen a resurgence in activity, with even high-priced age-qualified homes, ranging from \$700,000 to over a million dollars, being sold, which is particularly surprising.

The demographic landscape of Black Diamond has significantly evolved. The town, which initially had about 30 languages spoken by the early miners, now boasts even greater diversity. "We've been growing a lot and seeing more diversity and younger families moving in, which brings a vibrant and dynamic energy to Black Diamond," says Mayor Benson. This shift is



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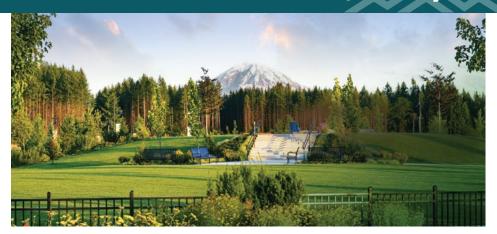
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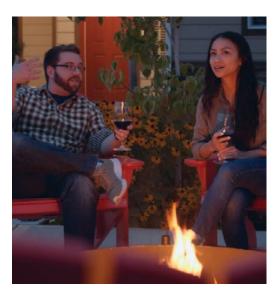
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# Ten Trails: The Perfect Blend of Nature, Community, and Modern Living in Historic Black Diamond, WA















Founded by immigrants who first came to the Cascade foothills in the 1880s to mine coal, Black Diamond is a community rich in history and cultural identity known for its small-town neighborliness and welcoming spirit. From the historic train depot turned history museum to the regionally famous Black Diamond Bakery, residents and visitors alike show an appreciation for what's familiar as well as new adventures.

Ideal for families and residents who embrace an active outdoor lifestyle, Black Diamond is surrounded by Cascade forests with two state parks nearby and Lake Sawyer, offering a variety of water sports including boating, fishing, swimming and water skiing. Two of the Cascade's most popular winter destinations, Crystal Mountain, with its 50 ski runs, and Mount Rainier are only an hour's drive away.

Black Diamond's many amenities embrace its history with longstanding traditions, festivals and events, such as the annual Black Diamond Miner's Day, while adding new activities including the annual Christmas tree lighting complete with Santa hosted by Ten Trails, a 4,500 -home, master-planned community within the city. Ten Trails also provides summer-in-the-park concerts and movie nights, sunset markets and seasonal holiday celebrations, along with many miles of hiking and biking trails open to the public.

evident as more younger families move into the area, bringing with them a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

# **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES**

Business development in Black Diamond faces challenges in attracting commercial enterprises, particularly within the designated commercial sections of the MPDs. Most development has occurred along the state highway, where a few successful builders are active.

The town's reliance on property tax to fund public safety, coupled with a lack of business and occupation tax and a low sales tax rate, underscores the need to attract more businesses. However, incentives such as waived broadband fees in Ten Trails have been appealing, especially during the pandemic, when remote work became prevalent. The measures have made Black Diamond an attractive option for homebuyers seeking robust internet connectivity for remote work.

As Mayor Benson highlights, economic development is a significant focus for Black Diamond. Last year, the town received a grant from the Port of Seattle, which facilitated the creation of a promotional video showcasing current businesses and emphasizing the benefits of operating in Black Diamond. Among the businesses featured were Redline Mechanical and Provident Electric. The developer, Oak Pointe Development, also had a segment, reflecting the collaborative efforts to boost the local economy.

## **ENGAGING COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Community-focused events play a fundamental role in bringing people together in Black Diamond. One of the standout events is Miners Day, a one-day celebration in July that honors the town's rich mining history. Additionally, the annual Labor Day Festival offers activities, including a Saturday night movie at the Ten Trails development and various events along Highway 169. A highlight of Labor Days is the parade on Labor Day itself, which temporarily closes a mile of the state highway, much to the delight of residents and visitors.



The Fourth of July is another significant event, particularly for the 322 homes around Lake Sawyer. The lake's homeowner's association organizes various activities, including a fun run, paddleboard and kayak races, water ski competitions, and a grand fireworks display. The festivities can be enjoyed from two parks: Lake Sawyer Regional Park, spanning 142 acres, and a smaller boat launch park.

Black Diamond is also host to the well-known Tough Mudder, an endurance event that has been a fixture in the community since around 2013. Most events occur on private land, with some portions running through Lake Sawyer Regional Park and Palmer Coking Coal property. The event, attracting participants from near and far, features the town's ability to host large-scale, community-centric events.



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# CREATING VIBRANT, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: Parametrix and City of Black Diamond's 20-Year Partnership

The City of Black Diamond, nestled in the foothills of Mount Rainier in Washington State, offers a rural, small-town atmosphere, but is growing rapidly.

It's crucial for the city to maintain its rural feel while incorporating innovative and resilient infrastructure to accommodate this growth. Parametrix, an engineering and consulting firm based in Western Washington, is partnering with the city to ensure that its infrastructure grows sustainably to meet the increasing demands of the community and region.

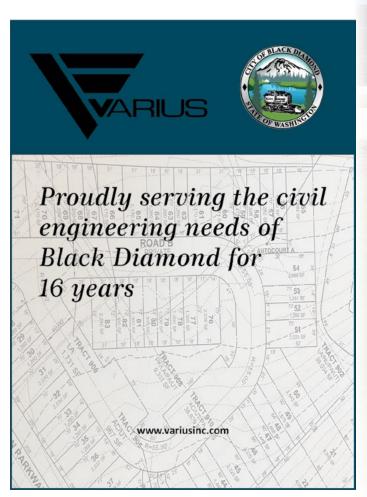
Parametrix has supported local governments with civil and environmental services for over 50 years. The firm's partnership with the City of Black Diamond dates back nearly 20 years when Parametrix was hired to work on development review projects. Since then, the two have partnered on a range of projects with Parametrix providing services that include environmental documentation, master development planning and engineering, traffic planning, civil engineering design, and construction support.

# KEY PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Special groups and partners are crucial to Black Diamond's vibrancy and community cohesion. One such entity is the Maple Valley-Black Diamond Chamber of Commerce. Over the past year, the Chamber has been working diligently to increase the involvement of Black Diamond businesses, fostering a stronger business community within the town.

Another key organization is the Black Diamond Community Center. The center is integral to the town's social fabric, offering various services and events. It runs a food and clothing bank and sponsors and delivers lunches twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Community Center is heavily involved in supporting the town's residents, particularly those in need.

Partnerships with developers are also essential to the town's development strategy. Developers are collaborating with the city and the Community Center





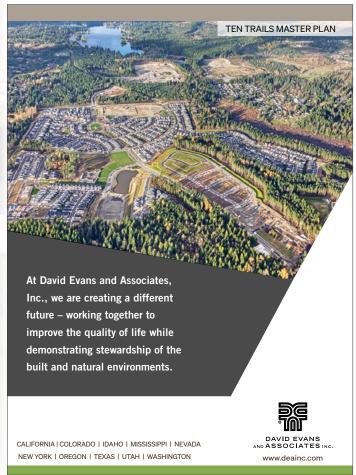


to build new facilities within the MPDs and Ten Trails. The new facilities will include improved amenities and parking, addressing current limitations. The Community Center, currently located on Highway 169 with limited parking, will benefit significantly from the new developments, especially for aging adults who find it challenging to park at the current location.

The planned relocation of the Community Center to Ten Trails, in conjunction with the new City Hall facilities, represents a strategic partnership that aims to enhance community services and accessibility. The collaboration is expected to provide better infrastructure and support for the residents, reflecting Black Diamond's commitment to fostering strong community partnerships and improving the quality of life for its citizens.

# **COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING**

The city's police department is another point of pride. After years of effort, the department is now







fully staffed with 13 officers, including a marine patrol unit for Lake Sawyer. Last year, the department secured a new patrol boat with grant and insurance funds after the previous one sank. A new dock is also being built at the boat launch park to facilitate boat launches and provide additional public access.

Mayor Benson proudly states, "Our police department is a community police department, and we're usually in the top 10 safest cities." The police department is dedicated to fostering strong, positive relationships within the community through proactive community policing efforts. By embedding officers within neighborhoods, they ensure that they become familiar faces, building trust and open lines of communication with residents. Their approach emphasizes collaboration, where officers work closely with community members to address local concerns, prevent crime, and enhance public safety.

# **VISION FOR 2024 AND BEYOND**

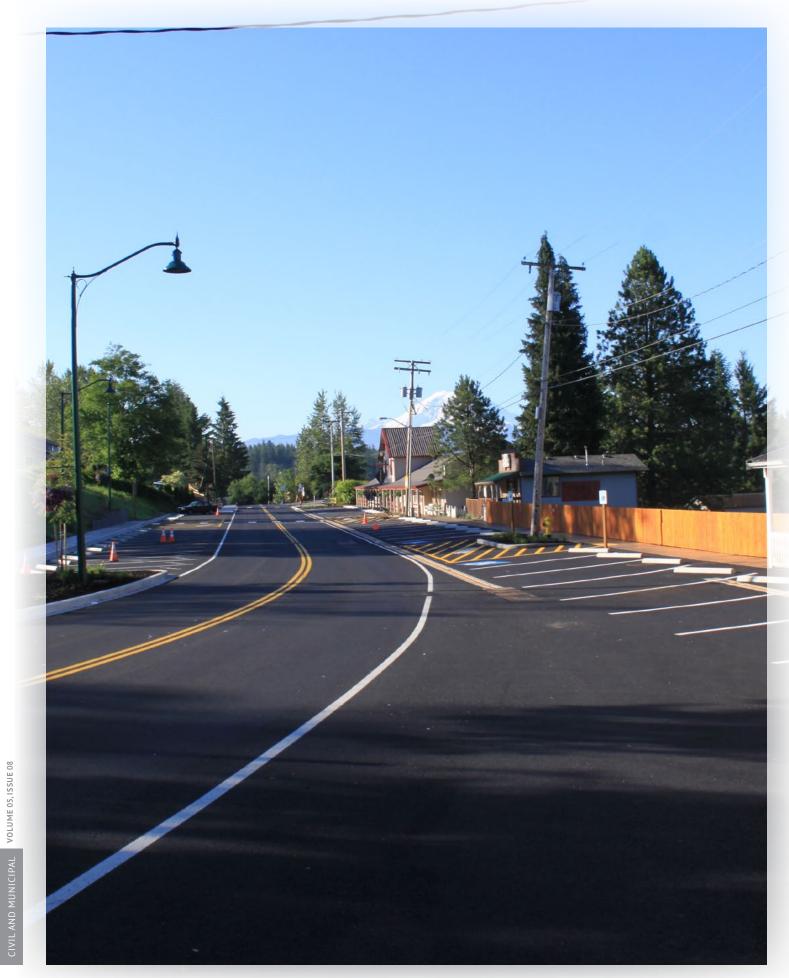
Black Diamond has several ambitious projects and a clear vision for the future. One of the most significant developments is the construction of a new City Hall



and Community Center, to be built together in one location. The project, facilitated by a developer, promises to provide modern, accessible facilities to better serve the community's needs. Additionally, there are plans for future park developments to enhance spaces for active community events.

The comprehensive approach to growth, infrastructure, and community engagement illustrates Black Diamond's dedication to improving the quality of life for its residents. With a proactive vision and strong community partnerships, the town is well-positioned to continue its positive trajectory into the future.





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Ten Trails is a 2,200-acre, master planned community at 32607 Willow Avenue SE in Black Diamond, Washington, designed for families and residents who embrace an active outdoor lifestyle. Developed by Oakpointe Communities, Ten Trails offers parks and trails, technologically advanced and amenity-filled homes, future schools, local shops and offices, all with proximity to major metropolitan areas and some of the region's largest employers. For more information, call 360-469-4043 or visit www.tentrails.com

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Parametrix is a 100% employee-owned firm helping to deliver resilient infrastructure, livable communities, and environmentally sustainable solutions. From offices across the Western United States, our team of engineers, planners, scientists, landscape architects, surveyors, project managers, and construction managers are helping our clients imagine what's possible and create tomorrow, together.

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CARENCRO, LA

AT A GLANCE

CARENCRO, LA

WHAT: A growing town focused on infrastructure, residential development,

and community engagement

WHERE: Carencro, Louisiana

WEBSITE: www.carencro.org



Mayor Charlotte Stemmans Clavier, a lifelong resident, passionately describes Carencro as "the most wonderful place on Earth." Her affection for her hometown is evident as she highlights its diverse and progressive nature, particularly for a Southern community. "We have both the interstate and a very quaint downtown," she notes, highlighting the blend of modern connectivity and small-town appeal.

The town's evolution over the past two decades is remarkable. Mayor Clavier mentions that Carencro has seen significant growth in the residential and business sectors. "Probably in the last 20 years, our businesses have expanded from local mom-and-pop operations to more national names," she says. Carencro's parks department is also on the upswing, providing residents with improved recreational spaces. These parks offer a green respite amidst the burgeoning development, making Carencro a well-rounded community for families and individuals.

# ECONOMIC PILLARS AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Recent developments have significantly bolstered Carencro's economic landscape, transforming it into a burgeoning hub of activity. Key sectors and strategic infrastructure projects drive this transformation, shaping a community that balances growth with maintaining its unique charm.

"With the newest addition of the Amazon facility, Carencro is priming itself to be a logistics and transportation hub," says Brittany Deal, Director of Business Intelligence at the Lafayette Economic Development Authority. The town's strategic location and the presence of significant companies enhance its appeal as a center for logistics and transportation. "We also have Southwest Freight and FedEx up here," Deal adds, indicating the area's growing prominence in the sector.

The historic downtown area of Carencro holds a special place in the community, embodying its traditional family feel. Mayor Clavier emphasizes the significance of the city's first master plan to revitalize this cherished area. "We are in the middle of the city of Carencro's first master plan," she states, highlighting the extensive efforts to modernize infrastructure while preserving its historic charm.



The project includes making downtown sidewalks ADA-compliant and addressing an essential need given their original design for horse and carriage traffic.

Transportation is crucial for Carencro, as it provides easy access to nearby urban centers and supports its economic activities. "We have University Avenue, a state highway that connects from exit seven on I-49 to the airport," Mayor Clavier details. The town is well-connected through significant thoroughfares like Veterans Boulevard and Gloria Switch, facilitating



smooth commutes and bolstering its attractiveness for hybrid work arrangements.

# **ECONOMIC PROJECTS AND DEVELOPMENT**

The economic landscape of Carencro is set for further transformation, and several ambitious projects are on the horizon. These initiatives aim to bolster the town's infrastructure and attract new businesses, enhancing the community's overall economic vitality.

"Amazon was probably the last major project we worked on with the city of Carencro," says Deal. Bringing Amazon to Carencro required strategic maneuvering at the state level, ensuring the company's needs were met while promising substantial job creation. "At the time, they were talking about 500 employees, and now they're well over 1200," she proudly states. The project created jobs and necessitated ongoing infrastructure improvements, such as streetlights and enhanced road safety measures for the increased traffic around the facility.

Deal's role is pivotal in this context. "Each of the municipalities has a dedicated liaison, and I'm the liaison for Carencro," she explains. Her job involves addressing any issues that arise and facilitating the city's efforts to attract new businesses. This proactive approach ensures that Carencro remains competitive and appealing to potential investors.

One of the exciting initiatives in progress involves collaborating with Retail Strategies, a company based in Birmingham, Alabama. "We recently took a trip with all of our municipalities, including Carencro, to Retail Strategies," Deal shares. This company specializes in teaching smaller municipalities the "secret sauce" for effectively recruiting retail businesses. By leveraging this knowledge, Carencro aims to expand its retail offerings, providing residents with more shopping and dining options while boosting the local economy.

# **INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY ENHANCEMENTS**

Carencro's robust infrastructure projects encompass modernizing and maintaining essential services while preparing for future growth. These initiatives ensure that the community can thrive both economically and socially.

Mayor Clavier outlines the city's efforts to upgrade its water and sewer systems, which date back to the early 1900s. "We're in the middle of replacing thousands of feet of old cast iron water lines," she says, highlighting the urgency of updating these aging pipes. Additionally, the city is preparing to bid out a new sewer treatment facility, a significant investment in Carencro's infrastructure that will support future development and improve current services.

The parks department is also seeing revitalization.



"We took over running our parks department on December 1st and are working on projects to enhance those parks," she explains. The city's focus on green spaces aims to improve residents' quality of life, provide more recreational opportunities, and maintain the town's family-friendly environment.

Carencro's gas lines are also undergoing significant upgrades. The mayor notes, "We received a grant to replace our cast iron gas lines throughout town." This project is part of a broader initiative to ensure the reliability and safety of the city's utility services.

### **ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY**

Carencro's progress extends beyond economic development to include a range of civic and social

initiatives that foster a sense of community and enhance the quality of life. These efforts ensure that the town is a place to live and work and where people feel genuinely connected and valued.

"We look at our citizens as stakeholders," says Beduze. This perspective drives the city's efforts to retain and expand its population by making Carencro an inviting place for families to settle and grow. A standout initiative has been the introduction of Senior Bingo. "The mayor had a goal to bring the elderly population out since COVID to network and socialize," he shares. This program has become a hit, drawing crowds of 120 to 140 senior citizens who gather for bingo, cookies, and coffee. The smiles and joy of participants reflect the success of this



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initiative, which has also attracted sponsorship from local businesses.

The impact of Mayor Clavier's leadership is evident in the community's positive response. "Since Mayor Clavier has come on, it has been transformative," Deal observes. Her focus on resident-centric decision-making has fostered a sense of trust and collaboration within the community. Mayor Clavier emphasizes the importance of resident feedback in maintaining the town's standards. "At the close of every City Council meeting, I ask for public input," she says. This open-door policy encourages residents to report issues, ensuring the town remains well-maintained and responsive to its citizens' needs.

The mayor's deep connection to Carencro, where she has lived her entire life, is a cornerstone of her approach. "The people that we have, our citizens, their friends and family, are people I've known for a long time," she reflects. This familiarity extends to newer residents, as Carencro's population has doubled in the last 20 years. The result is a community where everyone, whether lifelong resident or recent arrival, feels a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility for making Carencro a wonderful place to live.

# RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

Carencro is actively addressing housing challenges and ensuring a steady pipeline of skilled workers, fostering sustainable growth and community wellbeing. Mayor Clavier reveals that Carencro currently has 1,400 homes in active development.



"Last night, we gave preliminary approval for our first townhome community," she notes, highlighting a significant step towards diversifying the city's housing stock. Traditionally dominated by singlefamily residences, Carencro is now introducing denser housing options to cater to various needs. "I think it's a good mix for the city," she adds, reflecting her vision of a balanced community that offers spacious homes and more compact living options.

The influx of new residents, mainly from southern Louisiana, highlights Carencro's appeal. Mayor Clavier attributes this migration to more affordable property taxes, insurance costs, and the town's relative safety from hurricanes. "Carencro is on the upswing when it comes to population," she remarks, a sentiment supported by Deal's data. "In March 2024 alone, Carencro issued over 50 new residential building

permits," Deal says, a level of activity not seen since before COVID-19. With a median home value of around \$188,000, the town remains affordable for many residents, from blue-collar workers to students and older people.

# STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE **DEVELOPMENT**

Workforce development is another critical focus for Carencro, particularly in light of current labor shortages, especially in skilled trades. Beduze describes the city's strategic efforts to bridge the gap between education and employment.

"We've seen a demand for diesel truck drivers and mechanics," he states, highlighting partnerships with high schools and career centers that enable students to graduate with certifications such as a CDL. These collaborations ensure that students are job-ready and equipped with practical skills tailored to local industry needs.





Higher education institutions also play a pivotal role in Carencro's workforce strategy. "We've partnered with the University of Louisiana and community colleges to train future workers," Beduze explains. The deal adds that the Lafayette Economic Development Authority (LEDA) works closely with institutions like the University of Louisiana and South Louisiana Community College (SLCC) to maintain a robust pipeline of workers. "We created a nursing program with SLCC to increase the number of nurses entering our hospital systems," she says.

Job fairs are another crucial element of workforce

development. "We hold one big job fair every year in the spring," Deal mentions, noting strong participation from Carencro businesses seeking talent. Carencro's strategic location within the nine-parish Acadiana region positions it well to draw employees from Lafayette Parish and surrounding areas. "The level of skills among our employees is constantly being elevated through training programs and educational opportunities," Deal asserts.

# **LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT 18 MONTHS**

As Carencro progresses, the future holds a roadmap



of strategic initiatives to sustain growth and enhance the community. Mayor Clavier outlines the city's priorities for the next 18 months, emphasizing the pivotal role of the master plan in quiding development efforts.

The city aims to adopt the master plan by the second fiscal quarter of 2025, setting the stage for subsequent projects. "We would be ready to... look for funding, look at projects, and run those things down," she explains, pointing to a proactive approach to securing resources and initiating developments.

Carencro's master plan will help identify key priorities and direct efforts across various sectors. As the town continues to attract new residents and businesses. this comprehensive plan will ensure that growth is managed effectively, balancing infrastructure improvements with community needs.

The path forward for Carencro is straightforward and ambitious, marked by a strong focus on implementing the master plan and pursuing projects that will enhance the town's infrastructure, housing, and economic opportunities. As Mayor Clavier and her team work diligently to transform these plans into reality, Carencro stands poised for a bright and prosperous future, driven by a collective effort to build a thriving and resilient community.

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# ■ Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission

# www.lafayettetravel.com

Lafayette Travel was created in 1974 to serve as the tourism promotion and marketing coordinator for Lafayette Parish. Lafayette Travel's mission is to provide leadership in initiating and coordinating the marketing of Lafayette throughout the world as a highly desirable vacation, group, and convention destination.

# ■ Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC

# www.kcsrcpas.com

Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, a team of certified public accountants with over 40 years of experience, offering services in accounting, auditing, tax preparation, and business valuations. With seven offices across Acadiana, including Lafayette and Baton Rouge, their dedicated partners ensure top-tier financial quidance. Connect at (337) 232-4141 or visit www.kcsrcpas.com for expertise you can trust.



FORWARD THINKING
LEADERSHIP AND BOLD
INITIATIVES ARE DRIVING
THIS DYNAMIC CITY

# AT A GLANCE

# DERIDDER, LOUISIANA

**WHAT:** A forward thinking and determined city with growth

in the forecast

WHERE: Beauregard Parish, Louisiana

WEBSITE: www.cityofderidder.org



memories. By fostering a positive quality of life for everyone, DeRidder aims to attract new residents, new businesses, and new industries.

### INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Ongoing efforts are emphasized to keep DeRidder in top shape, highlighting the necessity of addressing infrastructure issues such as water, sewer, and streets. Local, state, and federal funding is crucial, with a constant grant-seeking process to ensure the city's infrastructure is well-prepared.

DeRidder's successes in expanding internet access are noted, despite initial difficulties with installing underground fiber. Residents now enjoy multiple service options. Given the city's location in hurricane central, the importance of internet access became clear when electricity and cell coverage relied heavily on it.

In partnership with Beauregard Parish, DeRidder is working on plans to prepare an industrial site in the community. Infrastructure is a key component of these plans. A comprehensive plan has been formed, partners have been secured, and the parish is well-positioned to implement the necessary infrastructure when needed.

# **DEVELOPING A SKILLED WORKFORCE**

As a Work Ready community, workforce development is a cornerstone of DeRidder's economic strategy, driven by a commitment to equip residents with the skills needed for today's job market. "We were certified back in 2017," expands Lisa Adams, Executive Director of the Greater Beauregard Chamber of Commerce. "Our workforce is made up of good men and women who are loyal. We tell new companies coming in, the people you hire today at 18 and 19 years old, will be with your company until they retire. Our people are hard workers, they're going to go above and beyond."

Strong partnerships between the city, chamber, and local education institutions help to bring forward specialized training opportunities that align with industry demands. Superintendent of Beauregard Schools, Larry Hollie notes that due to the rural nature of the district, and the local job options, there







is an even split between college bound graduates, and those who are preparing to enter the workforce right after graduation. "Starting at sophomore year, the JumpStart program provides for students to move into a career pathway, learning skills in particular areas," he relays. "Within our parish we offer welding, carpentry, website design, culinary, pipe fitting, and several other smaller courses such as registered truck drivers."

Additionally, partnerships with institutions such as

Sowela University, and Louisiana State University, provide students with the skills needed to enter the workforce. Beauregard Schools also partners with businesses to provide internships and apprenticeships, providing hands-on experience for learners.

Looking to the future, Hollie says it is a dream of the current school board to transform a historic former elementary building into a Career and Technical Education Center for the district. He elaborates, "We

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Industry electrification and renewable energy impacts require a strategy reset. As companies prioritize a clean energy future, Cleco Power is reinvigorating its economic development strategy and is here to support your corporate goals.

Cleco and its dedicated economic development team are laser-focused on preparedness, making significant investments to offer clean and renewable energy, and engaging with local educational and talent initiatives to power Louisiana's present and future.



Nearly 100 development-ready sites



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Flexible, reliable and responsive



Developing a clean and green energy future

# CONTACT

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Amy Thibodeaux Economic Development Project Manager 337-277-4950 | amy.thibodeaux@cleco.com





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Cleco has been a cornerstone of Louisiana's energy infrastructure since 1935 and attributes its decades of service to a dedicated workforce, strong customer service and a commitment to Louisiana's economic growth. As Cleco approaches its 90th anniversary in 2025, the company continues to be guided by its core values of safety, respect, community, integrity and excellence and focused on its mission to deliver safe, reliable and affordable power while positioning itself as the leading clean energy company in the state.



Meyer & Associates, Inc. (MAI) is a full-service civil consulting engineering firm providing professional management and technical services for all infrastructure needs for nearly 60 years.



Program Management | Preliminary Studies & Reports | Planning & Environmental Studies

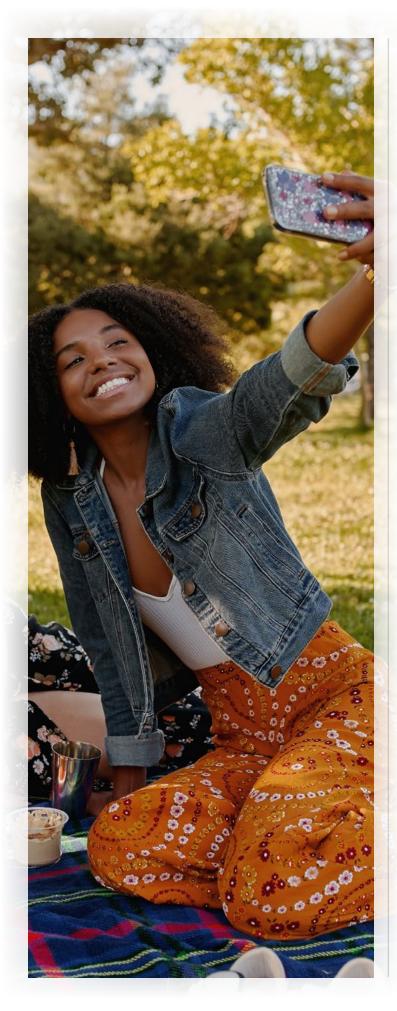
Public Works Utility Infrastructure | Public Works Surface Transportation Infrastructure

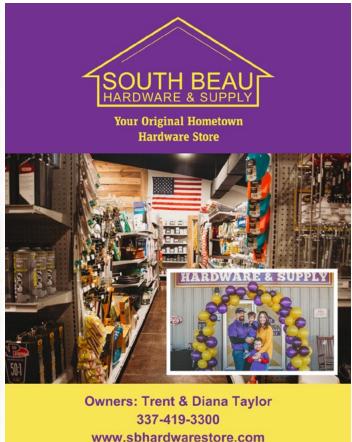
Public Works Water Transportation Infrastructure | Public Works Air Transportation Infrastructure

Environmental Engineering | Water Resources & Flood Control | Land & Site Development

Surveying & Mapping | Buildings | Waste Management | Industrial Infrastructure | Construction Management

Meyer & Associates, Inc. have been preparing planning studies, designing and preparing construction contract documents and providing construction phase services for: 1) port and marine facilities from a basic transit shed project to comprehensive new wharf structures involving both bulk handling facilities and state-of-art automated bag loading facilities; 2) water/wastewater projects that have ranged from a small complete system for a community of 200, to a comprehensive improvement program for a regional metropolitan area; 3) roadways from a multi-lane federal highway to subdivision streets; 4) drainage improvements ranging from roadside ditches to major channel improvements on the Calcasieu River and its many tributaries; 5) airport improvements for small general aviation airports to planning and improvements for a major industrial airpark/ airfield; 6) offsite and onsite product pipelines and metering systems for heavy industrial facilities to also include industrial onsite water, fire water and wastewater facilities; and 7) site civil projects including roadways, grading, drainage, parking and utilities for small industrial parks to major heavy industrial manufacturing plants; major land development projects from simple retail business to a regional mall, a major state owned resort, several large casino resorts, and major master planned communities. Additionally, the firm, with in-house staff, has planned and designed numerous buildings in support of the infrastructure projects engineered by the firm including administration buildings, laboratories, control buildings, terminals and hangars, manufacturing buildings, pump stations, fire stations, public works garages, transit sheds and warehouses.





are going to expand hopefully, with the help of some of our other business partners, and bring in med tech services such as CNR, LPN's, maybe two year RN's, cosmetology, and various others."

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# **EXPANDING HEALTHCARE ACCESS**

Traci Thibodeaux, CEO of Beauregard Health, talks about the pivotal role of healthcare, as the city has continued to face challenges like major weather events and workforce shortages. Referring to the most recent hurricanes, she recounts, "We were the first inland acute care hospital that remained open and servicing its community in the aftermath of the storm, and we're very proud of that. But we couldn't have done that without the support of the city and our emergency response partners."

Thibodeaux acknowledges the workforce challenges in healthcare, including competition from nearby facilities like the Army Community Hospital and Vernon Parish. "We definitely have opportunities for synergy with the school board in this vocational



# BEAUREGARD PARISH POLICE JURY

One of the 'Jewels in the Crown' DeRidder, LA



program," she conveys. "We currently have five travel nurses, and we have requested five international nurses. The struggle is real, and I definitely see value and look forward to partnering with them for this vision for a vocational program in the parish."

Currently Beauregard Health offers rural health clinics and a general acute care hospital offering emergency, surgical, and specialized services. Partnering with the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine the hospital hosts medical students in their third and fourth year clinical rotations. "We are the smallest community that serves as a primary partner for that school," says Thibodeaux. "So that means we have a year long rotation with our assigned medical students, and as a result, we currently have three medical students on scholarship with us who want to practice in our community."

Beauregard Health System is also driving economic growth in the parish, embarking on a \$34 million expansion project, featuring a new emergency department, a much needed investment. "We







currently see over 20,000 patients a year in a space that's designed for 13,000. So, we're busting at the seams and answering the call of our community," Thibodeaux reports.

This expansion is intended to address critical issues in patient throughput and emergency care, as well as improving other areas of service for the community, including obstetrics. "We know that women typically make health care decisions for their families, and so when and where we have the opportunity to provide a good experience for moms, there too goes the family. So, it's a little bit of a loss leader, but it is a vital service," she adds.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

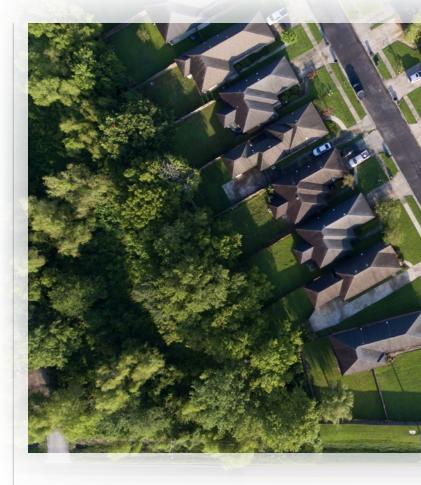
Adams underscores the importance of local voices in driving economic development. By forming the Beauregard Economic Expansion Coalition, community leaders are actively promoting the parish's potential, sharing its strategic location and

readiness for new business ventures. "We're a hidden jewel," she boasts. "You can hop in the car and be in a big city in less than 45 minutes. You can go and reach across the Texas state line in 30 minutes. We wanted to show that you can thrive, your company can grow here, and you can pull all that workforce in from other areas. So, we're really showcasing our city."

Through these efforts, DeRidder has successfully attracted attention and business investment, including the addition of Canfor Southern Pine, a sawmill, to the community. This marked the first time in many years that a new company chose to build in DeRidder, offering new employment opportunities. This experience served as an awakening for the new leadership, providing the opportunity to engage with Canfor and promote the community.

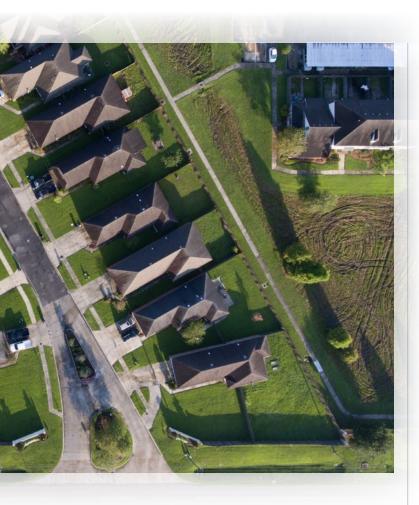
# RESILIENCE AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Reflecting on DeRidder's proactive approach, the city showcases robust growth and diverse housing options. With over 430 homes added in recent









years, DeRidder caters to various income levels and lifestyles and is currently engaged in a significant housing project with the state, bringing more affordable yet high-quality living options.

DeRidder's Parks and Recreation department has also experienced a transformation, growing from nothing only four years ago to hiring a director and a full team to maintain city parks, a pool, and sports facilities. Quality of life opportunities are always top of mind in the city, demonstrated by multiple concerts and festivals each year, a wonderful museum featuring the best of Beauregard Parish, and a city-owned art gallery run by local volunteer artists. The cultural amenities in DeRidder rival those of larger cities.

Despite numerous challenges, including hurricanes, industry closures, wildfires, and the pandemic, the community has continually rebuilt and protected its residents. The resilience of the city and parish is evident in their ability to be knocked down and built back up, regardless of the challenges faced.







# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ Cleco

# www.clecodev.com

Cleco Corporate Holdings LLC is a regional energy company that conducts its business operations through Cleco Power LLC (Cleco), a regulated electric utility that serves approximately 295,000 customers across 24 parishes in Louisiana. Cleco is headquartered in Pineville, Louisiana and has approximately 1,200 employees.

# ■ Meyer & Associates

# contact@meyerassociates.com

Meyer & Associates, Inc. (MAI) is a broad-based firm with considerable in-house strength in the port, transportation, water resources, drainage, environmental, site civil, and utility infrastructure fields from complete program/ project management services to project engineering and construction management services.

# ■ South Beau Hardware & Supply www.sbhardwarestore.com

South Beau Hardware & Supply, a family-run business in Longville, LA, opened in October 2022. Founded by Trent and Diana Taylor, we provide high-quality hardware products and exceptional service to residential and commercial customers. Our knowledgeable staff offers tools, plumbing supplies, electrical equipment, lawn and garden products, paint, and more, meeting the needs of our growing local market.

# ■ Beauregard Parish Police Jury

# www.beauparish.org

DeRidder, LA is one of the "Jewels in the Crown" of Southwest Louisiana. Situated conveniently north of Interstate 10 and South of Interstate 20, its location provides area business with access to rural, peaceful life with the modern conveniences while larger, urban experiences nearby. DeRidder area is where you've longed to be! Schedule a weekend to see Quality of Life with the Southern Louisiana culture.

# ■ Today's Country 105-7

www.westcentralsbest.com

# **■** DeRidder Property Partners

# cgreen dpp@outlook.com

DeRidder Property Partner's first started in 2017 as a small-town family business that has quickly turned into a US\$7 million real estate business that has acquired nine diverse long hold properties all over Southwest Louisiana. Our focus is to continue our endeavor by expanding this into buying multiple other properties to further our growth.

# ■ CSE Federal Credit Union

# www.csefcu.org

CSE Federal Credit Union (CSE) celebrates 80 years with a new DeRidder Branch. Led by Michele Chapman, CSE offers personal accounts, loans, and digital services. Beauregard Parish residents who live, work, or worship in the area can become Members and enjoy up-to-date financial solutions.

# ■ Bardin Vending Service, Inc.

# www.bardinvending.com

Bardin Vending Service is a full-line refreshment services company specializing in Vending Machines, Micro-Markets, and Office Coffee. We service seven parishes in Louisiana and four counties in Texas. The types of accounts we service range from Healthcare to Education, Military, and Industrial.

# **■** Greater Beauregard Chamber of Commerce

# www.growingbeauregard.com

Beauregard Parish aims to boost economic growth by promoting and educating the community, broadening industries, and providing opportunities for future generations. The Beauregard Economic Expansion Coalition, formed by local organizations and business owners, focuses on strategic planning to enhance the area's economic value.

NATCHITOCHES, LA

# WEAVING HISTO FORWARD-LOOK

BOASTING A BEAUTIFUL STREETSCAPE AND EQUALLY IMPRESSIVE BACKDROP, THIS CITY HAS A LOT TO BE PROUD OF

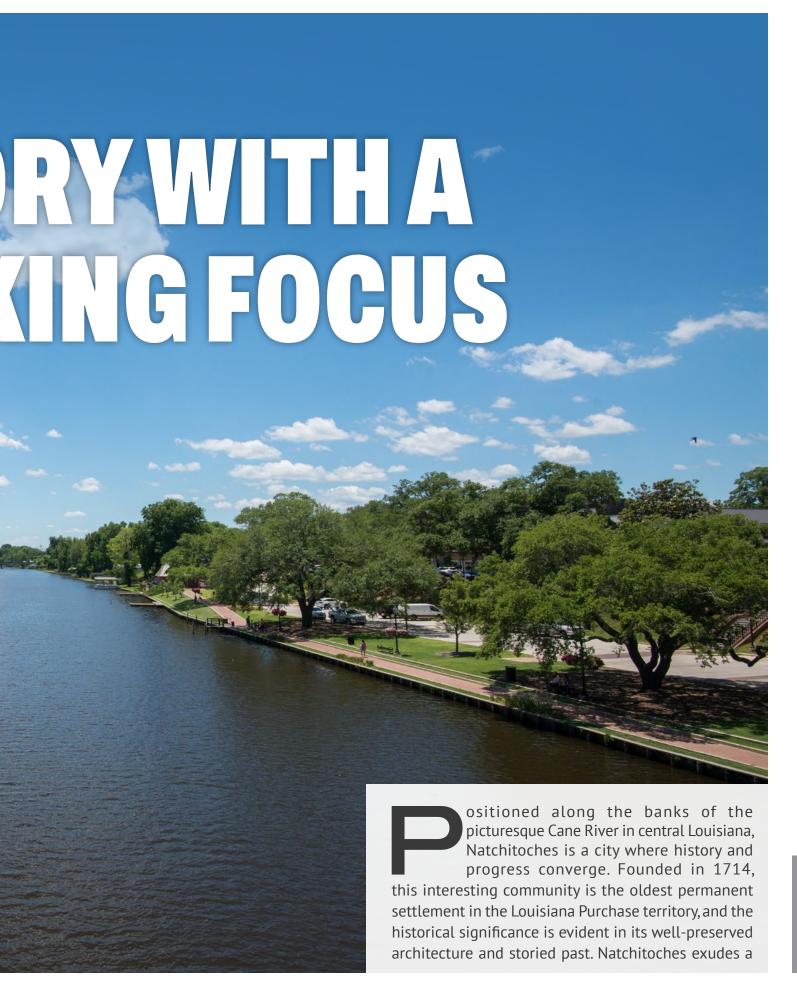
AT A GLANCE

# NATCHITOCHES, LA

**WHAT:** A historic and vibrant city in Central Louisiana

WHERE: Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana

WEBSITE: www.natchitoches.com



charming, timeless ambiance, drawing visitors with its brick streets, scenic river views, and rich cultural heritage.

### **CELEBRATING A COMMUNITY**

The city thrives on its vibrant and welcoming community spirit, supported by robust tourism. Throughout the year the community bursts with a lively calendar of events and festivals that attract visitors from near and far. From Jazz and R&B to the Zydeco and Meat Pie festivals, and celebrations like Juneteenth, there are a plethora of opportunities for locals and visitors to enjoy music and delicious food in the open air. However, the crown jewel of Natchitoches' festivities is the renowned Christmas Festival. "It's one of the biggest in the south," shares Mayor, Ronnie Williams. "10s of 1000s of people come to town every year for that event." Natchitoches is also home to the Louisianna Sports Hall of Fame, a tourist attraction, where sports legends like Shaquille O'Neal and Eli Manning have been honored. This year, Drew Brees is set to join the illustrious list of inductees.

# PRESERVING HISTORY AND ENHANCING DOWNTOWN

"We're known for our downtown," depicts Williams. "It is very beautiful in terms of flowers and how things are landscaped. And we've got the river, which is a central part, in terms of the events that we have." The city has made significant strides in preserving its historic landmarks while also enhancing the downtown experience for residents and visitors. "We are blessed and fortunate, we really don't have many vacancies ever," he boasts, noting that the many Mom and Pop type establishments, such as a candy store, and coffee shops, are supported by the Historical District Business Association, and add vibrancy to the area.

Williams notes that Downtown Natchitoches gained significant attention in the late 1980's, with the filming of Steel Magnolias, a classic movie starring Julia Roberts and Sally Field, which inspired revitalization of the city core. More recent developments include a \$5 million project, completed in 2018, that brought sidewalk improvements, hanging planters, new bollards, and an amphitheater with plenty of seating.



Additionally, a \$2 million project restored a historic house near the riverbank, enhancing its appeal as a venue for weddings and other events. Williams acknowledges, "We were just speaking about the need to do a new master plan. The last one was done 25 years ago, and there's a need for a new one to incorporate the walkability, and some of the wayfaring and lighting as well."

# INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Recent infrastructure projects include upgrades to the city's water and sewage systems, road repairs,



and enhancements to public facilities. "We like to tout that we're an old city. But what comes with that is aging and old infrastructure," Williams remarks, sharing that a \$17 million water treatment facility is in the works, increasing capacity from 7 to 10 million gallons per day.

Another \$17 million project is in the design phase, focusing on sidewalks, drainage improvements, and implementing a bike and pedestrian plan. The city is also budgeting to replace old cast iron waterlines. Williams details. "We don't have a grant with that yet, but we're looking to budget for that, a few million dollars every other fiscal year to replace some of those underground pipes." Additionally, the replacement of a downtown bridge is set to commence in the near future. "It's financed by the state of Louisiana," the mayor reports, "It should be coming on in the next one or two years. That's a major project for us."

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ATTRACTION**

The city is working to improve and area along the Cane River, known as the Mill District. Williams



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Waste Connections commercial waste collection provides your business with a range of containers and service schedules for your garbage pickup needs.

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- Commercial Roll Off Dumpster Rental
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- Bulk Pick Up
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Our decentralized business model empowers local managers to make decisions on the ground, ensuring efficient and responsive service without needing to "call corporate." Unlike many companies controlled by private equity or hedge funds, Waste Connections is here for the long haul. Choosing Waste Connections means stability and a commitment to long-term partnerships.

Our company culture is driven by a "Servant Leadership" philosophy that promotes respect, encouragement, accountability, teamwork, and genuine care for colleagues. We operate from a "bottom-up" perspective, cherishing our employees and expecting the highest moral standards from our leadership. We strive to give back to the communities we serve, fostering a sense of mutual growth and support.

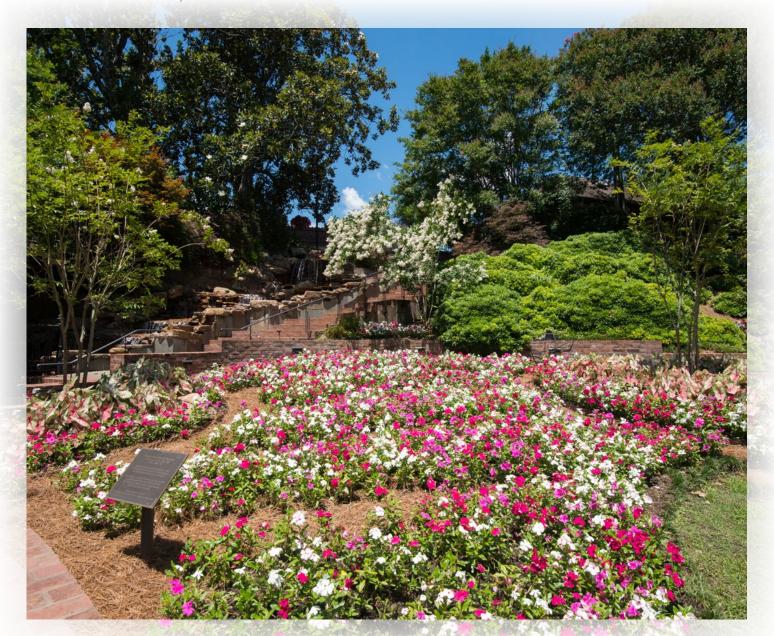
In the competitive market of hiring and retaining quality drivers, our financial health allows us to offer solid wages and comprehensive benefits. This attracts top talent across our service and maintenance platforms, enhancing job satisfaction and employee retention. Communities benefit from a dedicated and experienced workforce committed to delivering exceptional service consistently and reliably.

# **CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE**

Waste Connections is committed to the highest level of customer service in the industry. We recognize that citizens and businesses within the community are customers of both Waste Connections and their local cities. Our customer service commitments include:

- Human-Driven Service: Customers are always dealt with locally courteously and professionally.
- 24-Hour Availability: Local telephone numbers provide a Waste Connections service line available to customers 24/7.
- Prompt Response: Service concerns/complaints received by 2:00 p.m. are addressed on the day received. Calls after 2:00 p.m. are remedied no later than the next business day. All service concerns are addressed within 24 hours.
- Detailed Logs: A log of service questions, concerns, and complaints is maintained and provided to city officials monthly.
- Community Involvement: We are committed to volunteer work and active participation in business and community organizations, enhancing business and public relations.
- Well-Maintained Equipment: Our equipment is properly maintained to ensure efficient, clean, and safe service delivery.
- Thorough Training: Before employment, each Waste Connections employee undergoes drug tests, physicals, and background checks. After employment, they receive intensive training on equipment operations, safety, and customer service.
- Responsive Management: Waste Connections management personnel are always available to answer questions or service concerns from designated elected and staff representatives.

Waste Connections provides quality service solutions for residential, business, and industrial trash and recycling customers. We strive for a greener and cleaner tomorrow in all of our locations across the U.S. and Canada.



recounts, "That is an area we'd like to see get developed. It has a brewery now, and we're looking at trying to entice some other developers to come in there."

Natchitoches Parish is home to five major employers, referred to by Laura Lyles, Chamber of Commerce President, as "The Big Five." These include RoyalOMartin, a family owned company specializing in wood products, Trus Joist, manufacturers of joists and beams for homebuilding, and International Paper, who produce packaging products. Within the city itself is Alliance Compressors, who make parts for AC units, and Pilgrim's Pride, a poultry processing plant. "So those are our major industries. We are open for business," Williams conveys. He also highlights

Northwestern State University, noting, "That's a major economic driver as well, they're really important for us. They have a lot of economic impact, and they create jobs for our economy. We certainly want to see them do well."

He says the city is dedicated to supporting these local industries, prioritizing their needs during major weather events to ensure production can resume as quickly as possible, and maintaining a close relationship with plant managers through monthly calls, and an open door policy. Natchitoches also leverages Louisiana's Industrial Tax Exemption Program (ITEP) to help these businesses save money and reinvest in job creation. "We feel like that's a win win for us. We get a lot more out of the deal

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Flexible, reliable and responsive



Developing a clean and green energy future

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than we give up from it," asserts Williams. "We're willing to work with our manufacturers anyway we possibly can."

As the city looks to attract new employers, Mayor Williams underscores the efforts to foster a supportive and business-friendly environment. Recognizing the need to streamline processes and enhance online accessibility, the city has revamped its website and continues to work towards greater efficiency. "People have commented to us that they go to other cities, and they can do things online more easily, more efficiently," he admits, "We're getting to that point, to where it's very simple. We just have a few more steps to go."

Currently the community is seeing economic investment along Interstate 49, welcoming an auto mall, along with two other businesses which are in the construction phase. To improve traffic and safety concerns, a state funded roundabout is also

being added to this area. In terms of what types of businesses Natchitoches is hoping to attract, Williams says, "We would like for it to be a business that is going to be pleasant for people that live near." He emphasizes the city's efforts to attract businesses that align with opportunities from the Biden administration's CHIPS Act, with the goal of bringing more skilled and high-paying jobs to the community. "We looked at this EDA grant that's centered on the CHIPS act, of which the main goal is to manufacture semiconductors in the United States," he explains. "My thought was to connect with the university, they have some information technology offerings over there, in terms of degrees, and those could be some good paying jobs."

# ADDRESSING HOUSING CHALLENGES

The mayor highlights the ongoing efforts to address the housing affordability crisis in Natchitoches. He maintains that a growing demand, combined with limited supply, has driven up housing costs,



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Angle Cao, Student and Disability Services Specialist - Disability Services, 6220 East Texas Street, Bossier City, LA 71111 - (318) 678-6056 - 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. M-F, excluding holidays and weekends.
• Equity/Compliance Coordinator: Teri Bashara, Director of Human Resources - Human Resources Office, 6220 East Texas Street, Bossier City, LA 71111 - (318) 678-6056 - 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. M-F, excluding holidays and weekends.

### NOW WITH CAMPUSES IN NATCHITOCHES AND SABINE PARISHES

Bossier Parish Community College, affectionately known as BPCC, has been a cornerstone of Northwest Louisiana's educational landscape since its establishment in 1967. With a rich history spanning almost six decades, BPCC has consistently provided a high-quality academic experience, earning a reputation for excellence locally, regionally, and nationally. Its innovative learning environment, diverse programs, and certifications are designed to equip students for success in the current job market or further their studies at a four-year university.

BPCC's array of programs is as diverse as the interests and goals of its students. From healthcare to technology, cyber to criminal justice, and media to manufacturing, BPCC offers more than 40 associate degree programs and various short-term certifications. This variety ensures that every student can find a path that aligns with their goals and interests. The programs are designed to be flexible, affordable, and transferable.

BPCC has extended its reach beyond its main campus to Natchitoches and Sabine parishes. This expansion is a testament to BPCC's dedication to providing additional convenience to students across the region. Now, students can pursue their degrees close to home, eliminating the need for a long commute. It's community college without the commute!

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although not to the extent seen in places like San Francisco or Austin, Texas. Along with this, he says the attractiveness of the historic district, and the presence of the university are factors in the elevated real estate prices. "We have parents with means, who may purchase a home for their child while they are here for four years," Williams elaborates. "All of these factors contribute to the high cost of housing here in the city of Natchitoches, but the current Council and myself, we are willing to allow housing, and subdivisions to be built and to happen."

The recent adoption of a city wide master plan is expected to help Natchitoches deal with these challenges. "It lays out potentially where we could develop some housing in our city, we even talked about a tiny housing aspect, just from a viewpoint of affordability" he remarks.

### A FUTURE VISION

Natchitoches thrives not only on strong leadership and community engagement but also on vital



partnerships that contribute to its success. Williams points to key collaborators, such as the Cane River National Heritage Area and the Cane River Waterway Commission, which funded nearly \$5 million in recent developments. The National Park Service and Northwestern State University also provide crucial support, along with the many vendors the city works

with for essential services.

Looking ahead, Mayor Williams envisions a prosperous future for Natchitoches, driven by economic growth, enhanced infrastructure, and a safe, inviting community. "We want to do all of these things that lead to growing our population,



inviting people to come here, and not only come here but stay here," he relays. "Everything we do, from attracting businesses and reducing crime to improving recreation and infrastructure, all of that is with the goal to make Natchitoches a place where people want to continue to come, and a place where people want to live."

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

### **■** Waste Connections

### www.wasteconnections.com/natchitoches

Waste Connections, the third largest solid waste company in the U.S. and largest in Canada, with \$8+ billion in revenue and 23,000 employees, offers decentralized management, long-term stability, and a servant leadership philosophy. Our commitment to sustainability ensures innovative trash, recycling, and landfill management for a greener future.

### ■ Cleco

### www.clecodev.com

Cleco Corporate Holdings LLC is a regional energy company that conducts its business operations through Cleco Power LLC (Cleco), a regulated electric utility that serves approximately 295,000 customers across 24 parishes in Louisiana. Cleco is headquartered in Pineville, Louisiana and has approximately 1,200 employees.

### ■ Bossier Parish Community College www.bpcc.edu

Founded in 1967, Bossier Parish Community College is a 2-year community college with campuses in Bossier City, LA, Natchitoches, LA, and Many, LA. BPCC offers more than 40 associate degree programs and various shortterm certifications. Classes are affordable. flexible, and transferrable. School information and class registration is available at www.BPCC.edu.

### ■ International Paper

### www.internationalpaper.com

For more than 50 years International Paper's Red River Mill has been proud to serve as an integral part of the Campti community and surrounding areas. The mill employs nearly 500 talented team members that safely produce containerboard for end uses including corrugated packaging and paper for grocery bags.



"We have distinguished ourselves over the last 40 to 50 years as a community where people are focused on



excellence," says Carmel Mayor Sue Finkam.

### **EDUCATION AND ATHLETICS**

With its highly educated population, one of the many aspects that makes Carmel shine is its top-rated schools. The Carmel Clay School District is home to one of the largest high schools in the state with close to 5,300 students, three middle schools, and eleven elementary schools. With a variety of academic, arts, and technical opportunities available, the district also has an extremely successful athletics program, boasting 194 state championships.

"We have a highly-rated school district that is one of the primary economic development drivers in our community," Finkam explains. "Our schools continue to raise the bar. What I think our role is, is if we create an incredibly dynamic community that's thriving, it also helps attract the best students. It's a symbiotic relationship."

Carmel prides itself on its nationally-recognized School Resource Officer program that represents a collaborative effort between the Carmel Police Department and the schools to not only ensure safety, but also to foster positive relationships between students and law enforcement.

"They have a rockstar public safety professional who oversees their safety program. And it's something special. The kids appreciate the officers in the schools and this permits us to put a different face on policing, for kids," says Finkam.

### **BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE**

Carmel's approach to urban planning exemplifies its dedication to smart growth and innovation.

"One of the things we've done best is to build a master plan for our community. That started with our first female mayor, who dedicated an interstate that goes through part of our community as our corporate corridor," Finkam describes.

"This has allowed us to put our larger taller buildings along the corporate corridor and maintain and protect the residential corridor along Keystone Parkway where it's more tree-lined and quieter."







Guided by this strong master plan, Carmel has divided the core of the community into distinct areas- the Arts & Design District, Midtown and City Center.

"We've been investing heavily in those key areas from an infrastructure standpoint, with complete streets, beautified areas with flags and hanging flower planters, street-level public art, and beautiful public plazas where people can gather," says Finkam.

A popular gathering space, Midtown Plaza, referred to

fondly as Carmel's living room, has garnered national recognition. "We have a public plaza with a green space, multi-use pathways, corporate headquarters, restaurants, retail and other amenities like swings, pool tables, ping-pong and outdoor fireplaces where friends and families can truly gather," says Finkam.

This area also includes a giant outdoor theater screen where members of the community can watch movies and sports events. "We had 14 young people who qualified for the Olympic swim trials which





At Carmel Drive and RangeLine Road in Carmel sits Proscenium—an epitome of success for development projects. Proscenium has it all: condos, apartments, office, restaurants, retail and green space.

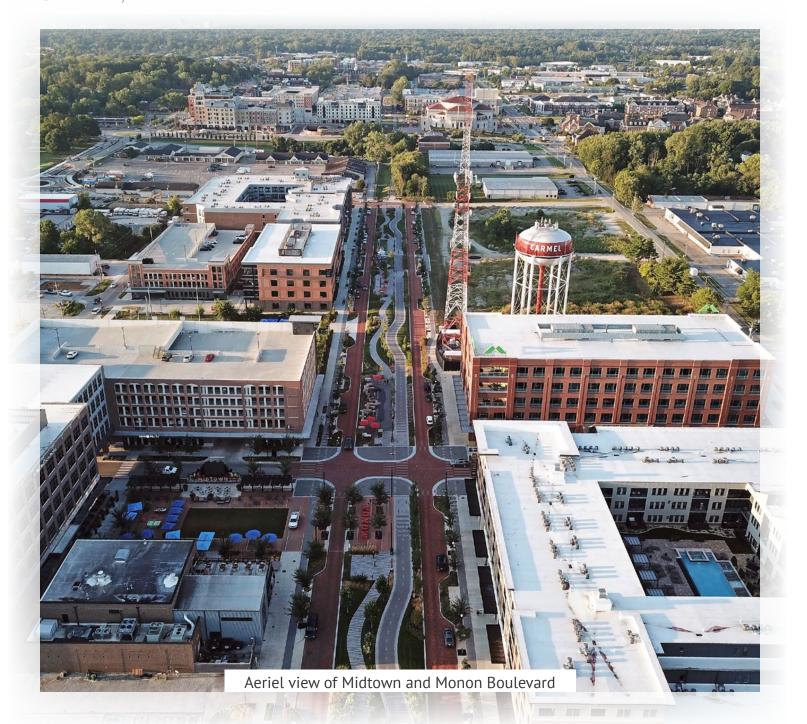
Developer Birkla Investment Group (BIG) is proud of its innovative architecture and aweworthy amenities. But owner Tony Birkla is most eager to discuss the elite partnerships they forged to get it done.

"We create real estate projects that attract people to be a part of something bigger," Birkla said. "Our trusted partnerships with cities, investors, businesses and residents create unique human experiences in real estate."

The City of Carmel, Woolpert Architects and Lake City Bank partnered to create Proscenium with great enthusiasm. Condos sold out long before construction was complete, and the project was honored with the Indy Monumental Award for Real Estate Development in 2023.

"BIG's public-private partnerships with the City have completely transformed one of our key redevelopment districts," said Henry Mestetsky, Executive Director, Carmel Redevelopment Commission. "The result has been a long-term investment in walkability and vibrancy."

Mestetsky is true to his word. BIG completed Mezz 42 in Carmel in 2015 and "big" things are to come. Overture at Proscenium is under construction, and Proscenium Phase 3 is on the board.



were held in Indianapolis this summer. We had four Olympic swimmers and their coach and one Olympic tennis player who competed in Paris. It was exciting to cheer for our home town heroes on the big screen," she adds.

### **DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT**

Featuring established community favorites like Bub's Burgers and Joe's Butcher Shop, Carmel's Main Street also showcases an eclectic mix of art galleries, service-oriented businesses and boutiques. Unique food and drink experiences are also plentiful ranging from local pubs like Woodys Library located in a 1913 historic Carnegie Library building to an array of international options from Thai to Greek to Italian. For more upscale offerings, the District features Anthony's Chophouse, Monterrey Coastal Cuisine and the newly opened, Tre on Main.

1st ON MAIN, a new development spanning 1.7 acres is expected to bring continued vibrancy to the area. Finkam elaborates, "This is a \$40 million project with 35 apartments, eight two-story for-



**CNOinc.com** 

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### AT CNO FINANCIAL GROUP, MAKING AN IMPACT IS EMBEDDED IN OUR BUSINESS.

Our purpose is to secure the future of middle-income America. CNO's customers work hard to save for the future, and the core of our business is to help protect their health, income and retirement needs.

Our team of associates, agents and independent partners remains a critical component to how we serve our customers, advance our mission and purpose, and make a difference in our communities. We are committed to positively impacting our communities by supporting nonprofit organizations and local partners that focus on the health and financial wellness of middle-income Americans.

CNO invests in giving back to organizations in the communities where we live and work, including our headquarters in Carmel. In 2023, CNO delivered more than \$2.5 million in total community impact through our philanthropic efforts, and our associates volunteered more than 8,750 hours within their communities.

CNO is proud to call Carmel our corporate home. We've had a longstanding history and deep roots in the central Indiana community and will continue to invest in it as part of the fabric of our business.



With our people, process, and technology, clinicians count on Zotec Partners to navigate the ever-changing healthcare revenue cycle efficiently while delivering industry-leading patient financial experiences.

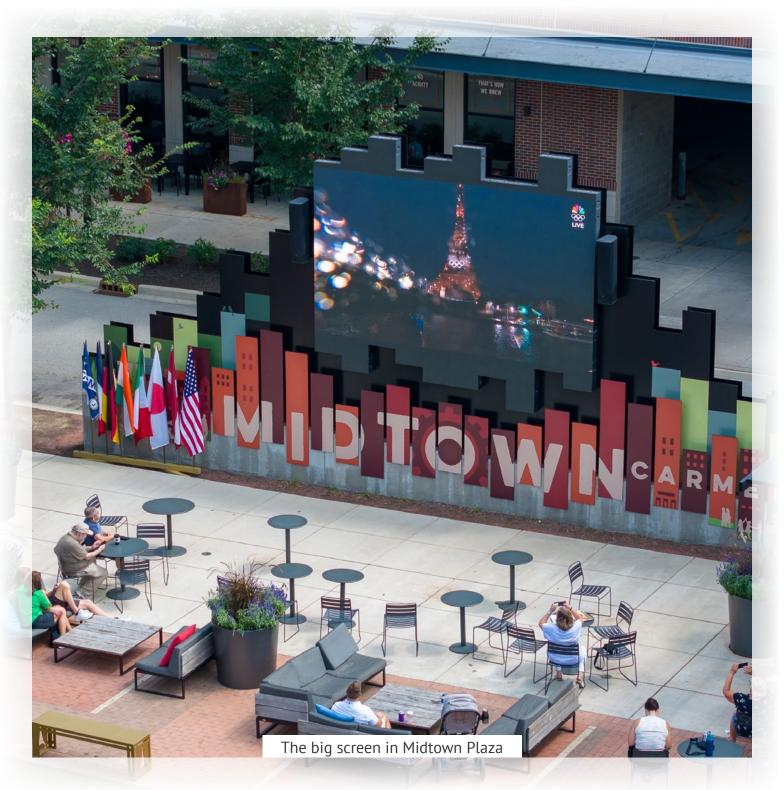
zotecpartners.com

### **HEALTHCARE IN THE HEARTLAND**

When it comes to purpose-driven businesses, people matter most. That's why Zotec Partners is located in America's heartland, where the Midwest work ethic and environment form a truly special community. Thriving in its hometown of Carmel, Indiana for over 25 years, Zotec supports thousands of clinicians nationwide and processes over 120 million medical encounters annually. The company simplifies a complex healthcare revenue system and improves the financial experience for everyone.

Behind this success is an inviting community for employees and employers. With its low tax base and cost of living, the city and state are business-friendly and family-friendly—an ideal formula for a thriving company culture. Thanks to strategic partnerships with local government, financial institutions, and healthcare leaders, Zotec continues to expand its innovative, data-driven, and compassionate revenue cycle solutions for providers and patients while reducing healthcare administrative costs, one encounter at time.

The company has proven that with its people, process, and technology, clinicians can count on Zotec to navigate the ever-changing healthcare revenue cycle efficiently and deliver industry-leading patient experiences. Located in a phenomenal community for families and businesses, Zotec's success story continues to have a promising future with incredible people, deep healthcare partnerships, and transformational technology.



sale condominiums and a 310-space public parking garage. It features 73,000 square feet of office space with a private rooftop terrace. It's a fantastic redevelopment project right in the heart of our city."

### INNOVATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Another notable achievement in the city is the extensive network of roundabouts- more than 150- that have proven to significantly reduce traffic fatalities and improve walkability, while also cutting down on emissions. The Keystone Parkway corridor has received national attention for its implementation of the world's first 'Dog Bone' roundabouts, used as interchanges onto and off of the parkway, which is at a lower elevation.

### **CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT**

As these efforts to maintain and enhance city



infrastructure continue, Carmel is also working to meet housing demands.

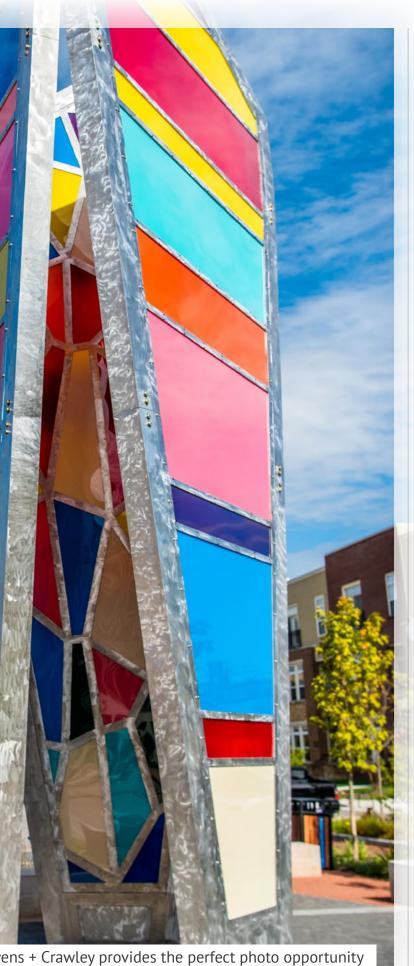
"About 75 percent of our residential properties are single-family homes. We've added a lot of for-rent products in the past 10 years and will continue with that model." says Finkam.

Ongoing initiatives include the creation of a Housing Task Force to look at the affordability and accessibility of housing stock in the community. "Like cities all across the country, we are challenged in providing enough housing for the demand and also making sure it's affordable for residents," said Finkam.

Finkam notes that Carmel is currently focusing on two major development areas. The first is a 78-acre site, owned and formerly occupied by CNO Financial Group.

"It is just west of our Midtown area, and we hope to find a partner with whom we can develop this area, as our economic development director describes it,







into 'Carmel's next great neighborhood."

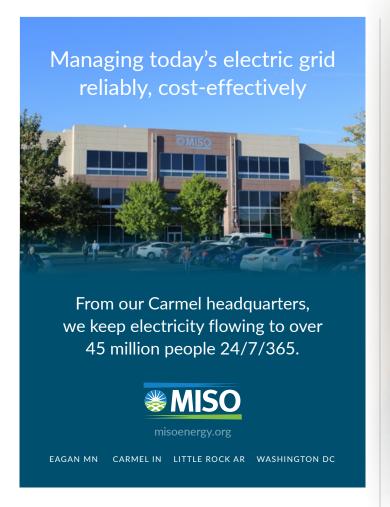
The aim is to transform it into a mixed-use development with public amenities while taking advantage of connected retention ponds for additional recreation opportunities. Additionally, the city is looking to update the corporate corridor along U.S. 31.

"We feel like this is an opportunity for us to reimagine the corridor; more mixed-use, more amenities next to these large office buildings because that's what today's worker is looking for and expects," Finkam emphasizes.

Mayor Finkam also envisions an International District in Carmel, celebrating Carmel's cultural diversity. "It will be an area where we can truly highlight all the different cultures represented in our community."

### **ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE**

Carmel's park system, developed in partnership with Clay Township, is a big part of the city's appeal,



offering a wide range of amenities from accessible parks to an impressive water park with a lazy river and wave rider. These spaces are a treasured part of the community.

"Every park has its personality, its unique aspects that allow our residents to have free entertainment all year long, and spaces to spend time with their kids, pets, or each other," Finkam conveys. With the development of two additional green spaces underway, Bear Creek and Thomas Marcuccilli Park, the City also offers an extensive trail network, including a five mile section of Indiana's Monon Trail and the upcoming White River Greenway.

"We have more than 220 miles of trails here, and a river that borders our eastern edge," says Finkam.

### **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

Looking ahead, Mayor Finkam says the city is committed to enhancing community engagement, fiscal responsibility, and youth involvement in Carmel. City initiatives like the successful Community Survey



which saw a remarkable ten percent adult response rate and the launch of a transparency portal have helped achieve this goal.

"I'm super excited about the portal because people will have more understanding of how we spend their hard-earned tax dollars. I am committed to fostering greater understanding of what the city does and how we operate."

Carmel is also rolling out a zero-based budgeting process, a first for the city. "The process gives us the opportunity as leaders to consider how we're spending dollars and what we're prioritizing, so we can be aligned with the needs of the community," says Finkam.

Moving forward, the city will continue to embrace the innovation, diversity and quality of life amenities it is known for, and, in the words of Mayor Finkam, "highlight why Carmel is an incredible place to be."

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

### ■ Birkla Investment Group, LLC.

### www.big.dev

Birkla Investment Group creates real estate projects that inspire. Founded by Tony Birkla, BIG has more than 30 years of experience designing and developing urban-styled, residential mixeduse communities. Each custom development incorporates unique features that attract residents and businesses vital to the larger community.

### ■ CNO Financial Group

### www.cnoinc.com

CNO Financial Group, Inc. secures the future of middle-income America. CNO provides life and health insurance, annuities, financial services, and workforce benefits solutions through our family of brands, including Bankers Life, Colonial Penn, Optavise and Washington National. Our 3,500 associates, 4,700 exclusive agents and more than 5,000 independent partner agents quide individuals, families and businesses through a lifetime of financial decisions.

### ■ Zotec Partners

### www.zotecpartners.com

Zotec Partners makes a difference by improving the way healthcare works. As the country's largest, privately held provider of revenue cycle solutions, we process more than 120 million medical encounters annually. Zotec's data-driven technology, patient insights and industry-leading services optimize the financial experience for healthcare organizations and patients nationwide.

### ■ Allied Solutions

### www.alliedsolutions.net

Allied Solutions, headquartered in Carmel, Indiana, is a leading provider of insurance, lending, risk management and data-driven solutions to over 6,000 financial institutions across North America. As a wholly owned subsidiary of Securian Financial Group, Allied Solutions offers customized technology solutions and a diverse portfolio of innovative products and services nationwide.

# ■ Hamilton County Tourism, Inc.

www.visithamiltoncountv.com

### ■ Invest Hamilton County

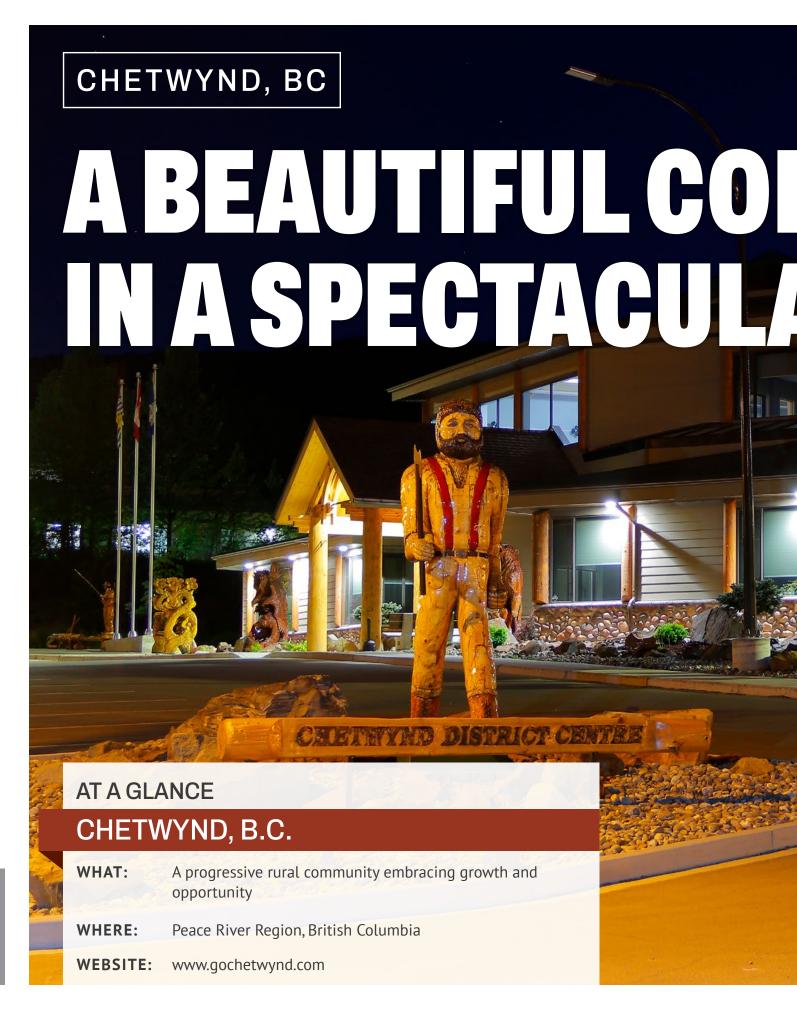
### www.investhamiltoncounty.com

Opportunity awaits in Carmel, Fishers, Noblesville and Westfield, located in Hamilton County, Indiana, Just north of Indianapolis, Hamilton County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. 150+ headquarters including insurance, finance, tech, ag, logistics and healthcare. Home to Grand Park Sports Campus, Ruoff Music Center and Conner Prairie.

### MISO

### www.misoenergy.org

MISO is the electric grid operator for the central U.S. and ensures power flows reliably and affordably across 15 states and the Canadian province of Manitoba. Additionally, MISO facilitates the buying and selling of electricity in its region and assists with planning the grid of the future.





# MMUNITY AR PROVINCE

Embracing Success and Community Engagement with a Forward-Thinking Approach Mountains, in British Columbia's Peace River Country, the District of Chetwynd could be described as small but mighty. With a population of 3,100, the community is a trade area of the rural region, serving 7000 people. Gorgeous in all of its four seasons, Chetwynd is surrounded by stunning forestland, and sparkling lake and mountain views, making it a sought-after location for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers.

The community also has a full-service recreation center and many kilometers of walking trails.

"Our work-life balance is exceptional. We're a resource-based economy, a lot of logging, some oil and gas, agriculture, coal mining, that kind of thing," describes Chief Administrative Officer, Steve McLain, "But we're kind of a sleeper because we're a small community with a lot of amenities."

### ARTS, CULTURE, AND DIVERSITY

"Chetwynd is an enjoyable community. We're remote and rural, but we have a thriving art scene," McLain shares, proudly noting that the municipality holds the title of the "Chainsaw Carving Capital of the World." Each June, the community hosts an international chainsaw carving championship, resulting in an impressive collection of hundreds of ten-foot-high chainsaw carvings that line the streets.

Chetwynd is a diverse community, with Indigenous people comprising 30% of the population. "Our mayor is the first Indigenous mayor in the province of British Columbia, and he's currently serving his second term," McLain elaborates. "In the last election, Mayor Courtoreille had a strong majority vote. It was about 66% who voted for him." The district partners with local First Nations communities on various initiatives including projects like the community forest, which is a collaboration between the West Moberly First Nations, the Saulteau First Nations, and the District of Chetwynd.

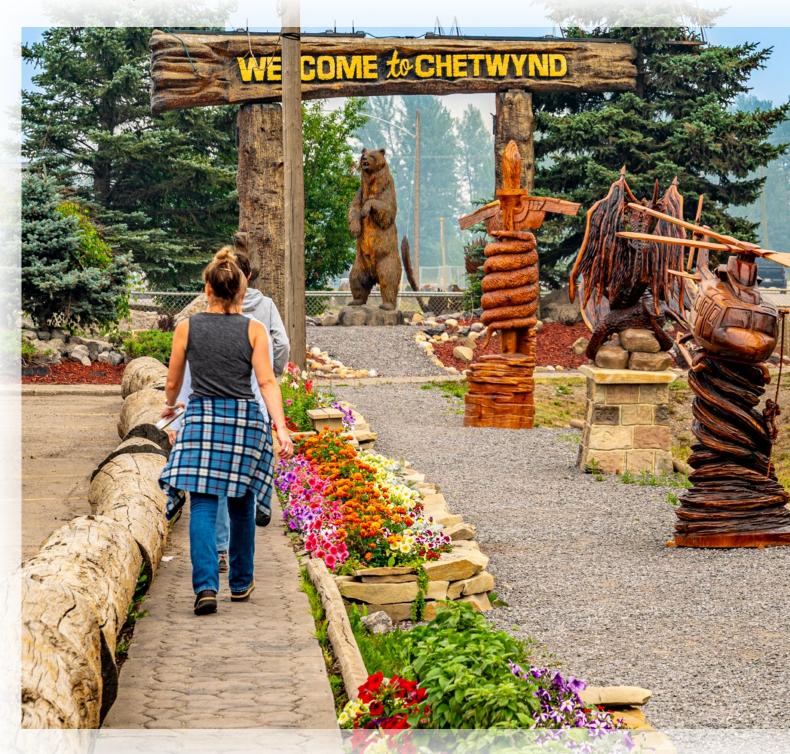
### PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY

Supporting locals is a key focus in Chetwynd, and the district looks to area radio station Peace FM, along with media partner EnergeticCity in Fort St. John and CJDC-TV in Dawson Creek, to help promote shopping locally and highlight community events. The Chetwynd Visitor's Center, which is affiliated with B.C. Tourism is another valuable resource, helping to promote the businesses and events in the area.

"Our economic development officer really helps us, and we have a very active Chamber of Commerce in Chetwynd as well," McLain portrays. "We're always there to help welcome business to town. And I'm lucky to have a mayor and council that I work for that







are strong in promoting business and opportunities."

### **INDUSTRY AND WORKFORCE**

Located in the Peace River Regional District of British Columbia, Chetwynd is positioned at a strategic junction north of Pine Pass, an area connecting the province's Northeastern Interior. "We're on a choke point for roads, if you go north of Prince George, anywhere basically north of the Pine Pass, you go through Chetwynd," McLain conveys.

"We have a rail line, a major highway, oil and gas pipelines, and the BC Hydro power transmission lines. So, we do have a lot of industries, we've got a lot of companies that are showing interest in development."

McLain highlights a few of Chetwynd's many notable enterprises, including West Fraser Mills, with the last functioning sawmill in the area, Conuma Coal, operating multiple mines in the region, and



Sukunka Natural Resources Inc, a natural gas plant. In addition, he mentions major pipelines like the recent Surerus Murphy Joint Venture pipeline and projects by TC Energy that traverse through the community, suggesting that more development is expected soon. Chetwynd is also home to supporting industries, such as Aim Trucking, Duz Cho Contracting, and Commotion Creek Contracting, which are instrumental to the district's progress.



COMMUNITY CARVED BY SUCCESS



Chetwynd is a playground for the nature lover and outdoor enthusiast. Good schools, playgrounds and fields help to make Chetwynd a terrific place to live and raise your family.



FOUR SEASON PLAYGROUND

For Economic Inquiries: 

gochetwynd.com

"There's just a large number of really active participants in promoting our community and making our community successful," he summarizes.

### INCENTIVES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

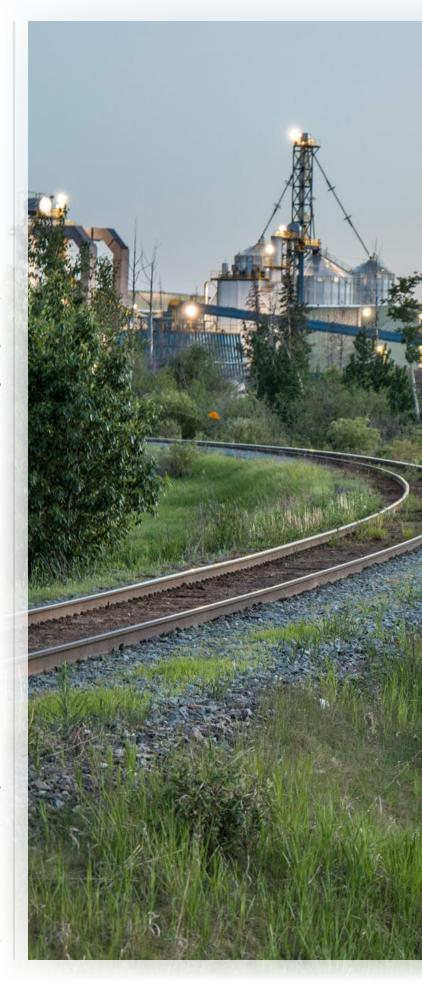
Chetwynd offers various incentives to attract new businesses, including tax incentives for developments exceeding a million dollars and \$5000 facade improvement grants for existing businesses. "We also have a lot of capital projects that are designed around promoting business," McLain details. "We're doing a revitalization in our downtown core where we're redoing water lines, and repaving. We put in LED streetlights last year, we've got a nice Christmas tree that plays music, and we're adding a bike lane."

Chetwynd is also investing heavily in infrastructure, with projects such as a \$5 million regional library recently completed. McLain expands, "It's a beautiful, huge structure, and we're quite proud of it. It ties in nicely with our rec center and an outdoor spray park that we put in a couple of years ago. We will end up with a recreational hub in the center of town, where we have free activities, all the way up to swimming and a fitness center and the library- pretty much anything you'd want for recreation and culture at your fingertips."

Recently, the municipality has partnered with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) to secure cost savings on asphalt, enabling significant street paving projects. "We've paved more of our sidewalks and walking trails. So now our walking trails are paved from basically from one end of town to the other, which helps us promote accessibility for all of our residents," McLain relays.

Last year, Chetwynd accessed over \$3 million in grant funding for infrastructure repairs, enabling the replacement of sewer and water mains, lift stations, and paving. The spray park and an indoor playground at the Rec Center were also fully grant-funded. "We're out there aggressively getting the funding and helping our citizens. This is partly because it is a remote area, and we are the regional center," McLain asserts.

The biggest ongoing project is a new fire hall, currently in the design phase, necessitated by a





service agreement with the Peace River Regional District. "We've outgrown our old fire hall, and we need a new one," he explains. "That's going to be a project in the millions of dollars, and we're really looking for grant funding and contributions from the ministry and anywhere else we can, to help defray that cost, because we can't put it just on our taxpayers."

Wildfire threats have heightened the need for this infrastructure. With 87 wildfires in the area over the last decade, more than half occurring in the past three to four years, the community faces the significant challenges of climate change. "We need to be able to send our volunteers out to fight fires, and with the climate issues that everybody faces now, this is becoming more and more of a critical issue for us," he stresses.

As the Emergency Social Services center for the area, Chetwynd also assists wildfire evacuees with temporary lodging and access to food. "Since last year we have helped over 1000 wildfire evacuees," he reports. "Again, it is a small team that's incredibly dedicated, incredibly good at what they do, and incredibly committed to helping their friends and neighbors."

Chetwynd is exploring more incentives to increase its affordable housing inventory and is considering some innovative solutions such as partnerships with the local college, to involve trade students in building these homes. Plans have also been approved for a 150-unit apartment building, and the community has several other developments in the works. Whenever possible, McLain says the district seeks opportunities to facilitate development, making the process as seamless as possible.

"Our building permit turnover is two weeks or so," he reports. "We're well ahead of the curve on customer service and that type of activity. We do a lot of development variance permits, development permits, and building permits. I'm very proud of the team. Our engineering department is stellar, and they have a really quick turnaround, because we understand that time is money, and we have a short construction period here."



### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

McLain emphasizes that Chetwynd's top priority in the coming years will be the construction of the new fire hall, alongside preparations for significant private investments. "We do have businesses that are signaling that they're going to do significant investments coming up. We're looking at pipe laydown yards, and getting ready for the next round of pipelines that are coming through town," he recounts.

He acknowledges the challenges facing the forestry sector, remarking "There's a bit of a concern right now for market variances and fiber supply, but the government is working with all the stakeholders and through the reconciliation process, and the treaty land entitlement process, to hammer out the wrinkles and build some partnerships there."

Chetwynd's relationship with local First Nations,



particularly as a Treaty 8 community, continues to thrive, with support for initiatives like the Southern Caribou Recovery Plan and the expansion of Klinse-Za Park. With continued growth and innovation on the horizon, McLain underscores, "There's so much opportunity here that it's hard to narrow it down."

## PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ District of Chetwynd www.gochetwynd.com

CROOKSTON, MN

# PAVICE PAVICE TO GIVE PROSPERIOR PROSPERIOR DE LA COMPANIO DE LA C

GROWTH AND INNOVATION
PROVIDE THE ROADMAP TO FUTURE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AT A GLANCE

# CROOKSTON, MINNESOTA

**WHAT:** A fast-growing city demonstrating a multifaceted approach to

community development, focusing on strategic initiatives and

grassroots efforts to foster growth and prosperity.

WHERE: Crookston, Minnesota, USA

WEBSITE: www.crookston.mn.us



for sustainable development.

Photo Credit: Mason Hendricks

High on the agenda is the enhancement and strategic development of new industrial areas, and the annexation of additional spaces.

As the city strides toward a brighter future, it's completing several comprehensive assessments of its critical infrastructure—roads, water systems, sewers, sidewalks, and lighting.

This will accommodate burgeoning businesses and foster an environment ripe for economic growth. This investment also underscores Crookston's commitment to providing top-notch services and amenities, essential components of any thriving community.

Encouraging partnerships between local entities, like the local university and businesses, has driven forward-thinking projects that blend education, research, and practical applications.

Crookston is succeeding as a vibrant, sustainable city where infrastructure supports growth, healthcare services excel, and a collaborative community spirit fosters innovation and inclusivity.

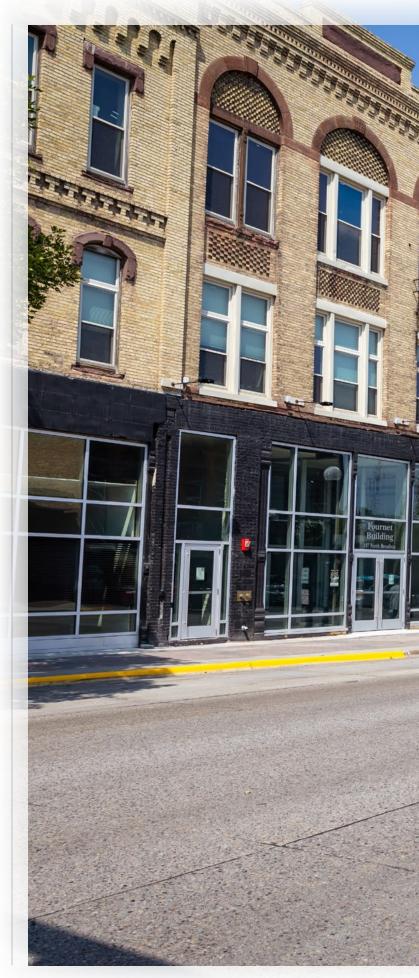
This vision of success sees Crookston not just as a city that grows but as a community where every resident thrives, contributing to a dynamic and prosperous future.

### A HUB OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

As a city, Crookston is beginning to bloom into a developmental hotspot for its region. Currently, it's growing in all areas across the board and has been investing most of its capital into holistically building the community.

"So, the city of Crookston submitted a full application for a small cities development grant for \$1.2 million. It's a comprehensive application... and it will encompass three different types of targets," says Karie Kirschbaum, Community Development Director.

The city is seeking to use the funds for improvements to its residential housing which will focus on exterior enhancements for mixed-use apartments, commercial buildings, and older residential homes that need refurbishment.







When approved, the city will begin construction in 2025, but before then, it's making sure that its current and future efforts are as sustainable as possible, as it wants to preserve its historic charm, especially regarding its downtown development.

In addition to the grant-funded housing, Crookston leaders have also identified a need for workforce housing.

So, every year the city purchases the space needed to build more affordable workforce housing and is doing so this year as well. The city is even looking to work to develop TIF districts around the same region to help enhance its affordability.

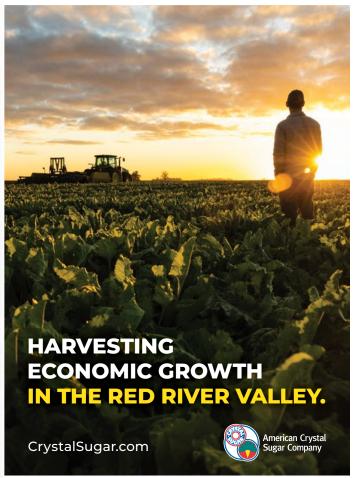
In addition to housing, the city is also paying special attention to the development of its amenities and natural resources.

"The city was recently awarded two beautiful ponds stocked with fish and walking trails by a gentleman named Bob Herkenhoff," explains Community Development Director and Executive Director for Housing and EDA Karie Kirschbaum.



Herkenhoff has become one of the city's largest private housing developers over the years and upon his retirement, he decided to gift the city with one final project.

Right now, the Red Lake River is the current area of focus for development. "So, Crookston has partnered with 5 other cities in the Watershed District who have come together to develop the Red Lake River Corridor," says Executive Director for the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership Shannon Stassen.



As Stassen explains, "The development is progressing, we are currently focusing on improving signage, enhancing the access points, and introducing additional bike trails along the river."

Despite being interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project is now back in full operation, and the slight disruption led to a better outcome for Crookston Amenities.

During the time the Red Lake River project was paused, the city gained additional approval for the construction of a new campground that has been built near Crookston's historic downtown.

"This will have water, sewer, electric, a new bathhouse, and much more," Stassen says, explaining that meeting contemporary standards will be a major objective for this project.

Crookston is hoping to add the RLR Corridor to its already existing array of beautiful recreational areas

like Castle Park and the city's historic theater, which has held the record for the longest continuously running movie theater for well over 100 years.

# A NEW ERA OF RESEARCH AND COLLABORATIVE INNOVATION

Crookston is developing in many ways, and one of those ways is through its advancements in technology. Crookston recently welcomed the AG Innovation Campus, which officially opened its doors last fall.

This state-of-the-art facility is dedicated to researching new strains of soybeans and oils, contributing to advancements in agricultural technology.

This collaboration underscores the community's commitment to fostering research and development, and it signifies a major step forward for Crookston's industrial park, which is rapidly becoming a hub for agricultural innovation.

It's important to note that the city's industrial development is moving along fantastically as well.

"We'll be putting a railroad spur in our industrial park... that's going to enable us to catch the rail straight over to the Duluth Harbor as well as to St. Paul," Kirshbaum says.

This added accessibility was only possible thanks to a \$1.5 million grant that the Minnesota Northern Railroad was awarded by MnDOT. With these developments in motion, residents will have an easier time traveling and farmers in the region now have a better mode of transportation for their crops.

The city's growth is driven by an innovative spirit deeply embedded in its culture. This spirit is nurtured by the presence of UMC and the innovative practices of local farmers.

This collaborative ethos extends to the broader community, creating an environment ripe for growth and development.

The partnership between the university and the local community is a cornerstone of Crookston's success.



UMC students frequently engage with local businesses through hands-on projects, providing real-world experience while contributing to community development.

This symbiotic relationship not only benefits the students but also supports local businesses and initiatives.

# LOOKING TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLY DEVELOPED FUTURE

Another standout example of community collaboration is the Empower Crookston Community



Development group.

"We're working specifically with some of the green energy initiatives that are out there. But it also includes the trails and the parks and helping businesses," Kirschbaum says, specifying that this initiative will bring together various stakeholders to focus on more sustainable development for the city's natural amenities and businesses.

A notable project under this initiative is spearheaded by 4H2 Incorporated, a local company developing direct ethanol fuel cell technology.

This innovative approach to generating electricity from ethanol, which includes exploring the use of cattails, is being developed in collaboration with research partners from the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Over the next 18 months, Crookston's top priorities will center on comprehensive assessments of the city's infrastructure.

One of the key goals is to identify and develop new industrial areas to accommodate future growth. As space in the current industrial park becomes limited, annexing new areas will be crucial for sustaining the city's economic expansion.

Parks and trails will also continue to be a focal point for community development. Enhancing these recreational spaces not only improves the quality of life for residents but also makes Crookston a more attractive destination for visitors.

The city is committed to expanding and maintaining these green spaces, recognizing their importance in fostering a healthy, active community.

Finally, one of the biggest developments in Crookston has been the \$51 million upgrade to RiverView Health.

The hospital's expansion is a key component of the city's broader strategy to develop a robust health community. Similarly, the city is seeking to inject more commercial developments within the region and is setting the sports center up to be a core driver of the local Crookston economy.

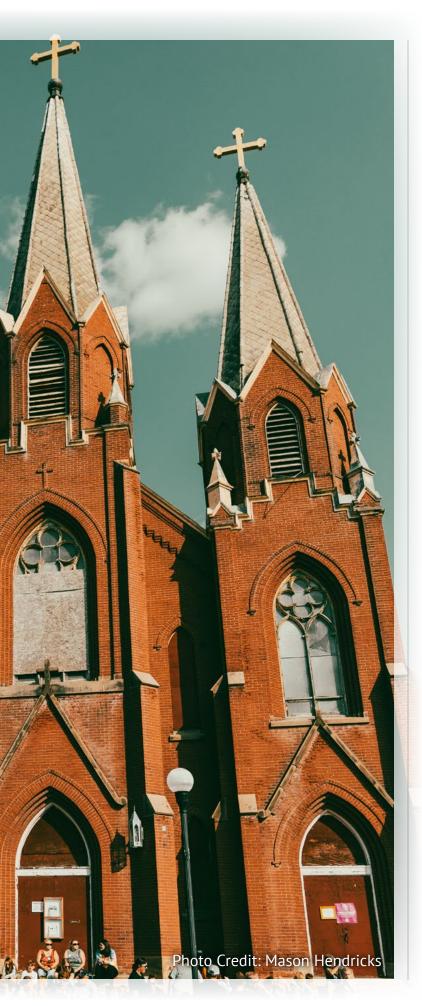
Overall, Crookston's trajectory is marked by its strong foundation, culture of innovation, and collaborative community spirit.

The city's commitment to research and development, coupled with strategic infrastructure improvements and comprehensive planning, sets the stage for continued growth and prosperity.

As Crookston looks to the future, its focus on sustainable development, community empowerment, and educational partnerships will ensure that it remains a vibrant and dynamic community.

With significant projects on the horizon and a clear vision for the future, Crookston is poised to achieve new heights in economic development and community well-being.





# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ American Crystal Sugar Company www.crystalsugar.com

NEW ULM, MN

# ARIDYLLIGE CHARM, TRA ANDINOVA

WITH GERMAN ROOTS THAT DRAW MANY TO SEE ITS CHARMS, THIS CITY REMAINS A STANDOUT

AT A GLANCE

# **NEW ULM, MINNESOTA**

**WHAT:** A unique city, blending progress and tradition

WHERE: Brown County, Minnesota

WEBSITE: www.newulmmn.gov



visitors from near and far. New Ulm is also home to the August Schell Brewing Company, often called Schell's Brewery, one of the oldest breweries in the United States, and an attraction to the area.

Often called "The City of Charm and Tradition," New Ulm is a community of 14,120 people, with the opportunities and amenities of a modern city. Mayor Kathleen Backer illustrates, "We have a wonderful backdrop for people to come in and enjoy the heritage of our community. But besides that, we have a terrific workforce. We have one of the top 10 medical centers in the rural United States. So, as we look at our community, we have the perfect setting, not just to 'live, work and play,' but to invest."

# SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT FOR A THRIVING ECONOMY

The city's economic development initiatives focus on attracting investors and supporting new businesses. A notable example is an EDA grant program, offering \$7,500 to start-up businesses and successfully helping many new enterprises establish themselves in New Ulm. "With that program, the focus is to get new businesses and entrepreneurs through that first year of business, that's always the hardest year. If they can make it through the first year there's a pretty good success rate of them continuing," conveys City Manager, Chris Dalton.

According to Dalton, New Ulm welcomed 14 new businesses in 2023. Among the notable additions are Gypsy Girl Consignment Boutique, located downtown, Rush, a rooftop restaurant that is a first for southwest Minnesota, and White Boxer Coffee Company, an independent roaster supplying local coffee shops. Other new businesses include Broadway Bait, Midwest Detail Garage, and several transportation services addressing local needs. Additional service-based companies such as Revive Aesthetics, AMS Grooming Salon, and Cove Collective have also recently opened, contributing to the city's growing business landscape.

## A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN

Downtown New Ulm is a bustling area, as Mayor Backer portrays, "I don't know many communities our size that have a shortage of available storefronts in the downtown area for people to come in with new



businesses. We have been very, very fortunate in the last couple of years with an influx and reinvestment of individuals and organizations in our downtown."

Dalton highlights ongoing and future improvements for New Ulm's downtown area, where the city currently offers facade improvement programs for businesses, and is considering a streetscape project. "Right now, it's a one-way street through our downtown area,



and we will work with business and property owners to see if there's another way for that streetscape to look," he says. Potential options include changing to a two-way street, moving parking to another area, and expanding sidewalks to create larger patio space for restaurants, and pedestrian-friendly areas.

### HOUSING AND REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

Eric Bode, Owner of BoCo Real Estate, discusses the

shifting demographics New Ulm is experiencing, noting a growing influx of retirees and younger people taking up roles in professional services and business ownership. He says this change has sparked a demand for new housing options. "Right now, we've had a shortage in the single-family home category, just from the aspect of people coming to town and people not moving out of their current homes into the next venture in life," he recounts. To encourage a turnaround of housing stock, the city has put together a rehab program, helping homeowners to get their homes in shape to sell.

"So, rehabbing the bones of the building-roofs, windows, things like that," details Dalton. "If you're 65 and older, you don't make any payments until you sell the house. If you're younger than 65, it's a ten-year 1% interest loan to help you with those projects."

New Ulm is also pursuing the development of apartment units, reflecting findings from a recent housing study. "As of right now we have a 1% vacancy rate," Dalton reports. "We have roughly 5900 individuals driving into town every day for work, some because they can't find a place in town. So, looking at what's going on, I think this will fulfill our need."

Along with encouraging mixed-use development in the downtown area, New Ulm is seeing the reuse of existing properties, creating unique housing opportunities. George's Ballroom, a beloved art deco building with a storied history in the city, is no longer inhabitable and will need to be demolished. On approval, a developer has plans to convert the property into a multifamily, mixed use offering.

Dalton expands, "We have gone through the State Historical Society, and they gave us certain things that we had to adhere to when demoing the building. We had a street dance, and there's a sign outside that the developer has to take down. They have every intention to keep that sign on site and potentially restore it to its glory days."

A 70,000-square-foot former shopping mall in the downtown is also being transformed to include housing, greenspace, and some retail, with parking



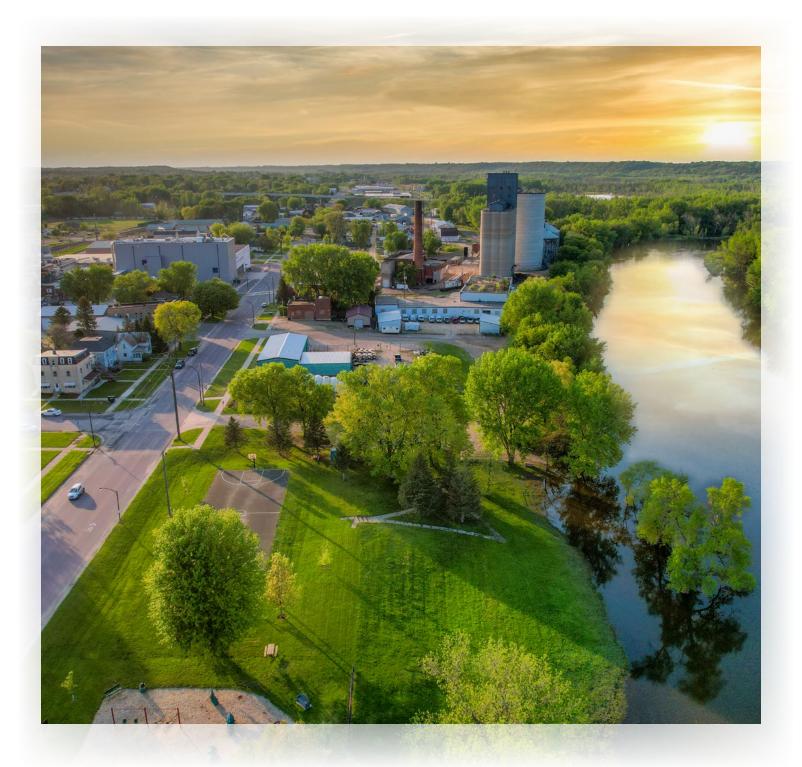


**Citizens Bank Minnesota** is a community-owned and operated bank, with its main office located in New Ulm and branch offices in Lafayette, La Salle, Lakeville, Watkins and Ormsby, Minnesota. Chartered in 1876, Citizens is one of the oldest banks in Minnesota with

over 148 years of strength and stability. We take pride in the fact that not only are we a community bank, as demonstrated by our energetic participation and support in the growth and success of the communities that we serve, but also that we are community-owned, with our stock widely held by residents of this area. Community ownership requires us to be sensitive to the needs of our customers and provide our services at reasonable costs. It also allows us flexibility to meet your unique financial needs.

Our team members pride themselves on their core values of Excellence, Integrity, Culture, Loyalty, and Innovation. Whether it is through our WooHoo! Banking products and services, community involvement, or dedication to knowing our customers and "Delivering the Ultimate Experience" every day, the team members at Citizens are proud to be a part of the history and future of the communities they serve.

We invite you to stop by and visit any of our experienced team members to answer any questions you may have or simply visit **www.citizensmn.bank**.



underneath. Bode, who is part of the project, elaborates, "We're working closely with the developer of George's site so that we both don't improve at the same time and flood the market. Hopefully, it will be a nice little addition to the downtown to add a few more feet on the streets and things like that."

# PARKS, RECREATION, AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

New Ulm takes pride in its extensive parks and recreation facilities. The community continually invests in improving these amenities through initiatives funded by two rounds of half-cent sales tax. "On the first round, we were able to build a 30,000 square foot civic center, as well as other improvements at that time," Mayor Backer describes.

"Now we're on the second round, we've made improvements to our Johnson Baseball Park, to our Hermann Monument Park area, and the park and recreation center, among others. So, we continue to look at how we can better serve our community."



Moving forward, Backer says the city is focusing on strategic planning, emphasizing the importance of continually reevaluating investments to align with residents' desires.

New Ulm also offers a range of educational opportunities through its three school systems. "We are very fortunate in a community of our size that families have a choice," asserts Andrea Boettger,

City Council President. The town's commitment to education is evident in programs like the CTE center, which focuses on technical trades, and partnerships with local businesses to provide students with realworld work experience. The Network New Ulm Youth Program, offered through the Chamber of Commerce is another valuable resource, giving students a first-hand look at community opportunities. "They can go through and see the manufacturing, the retail side,



the government side, and the historical side as well. Those are things that give kids more information about the community, and then it encourages some of those sticking points," she shares.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND COLLABORATION

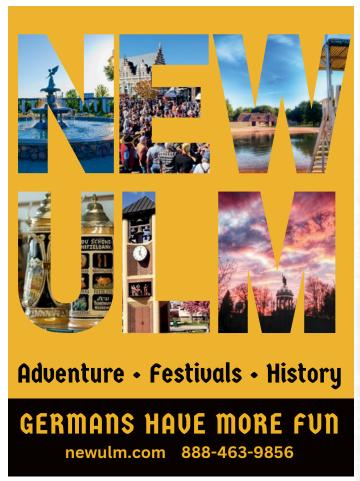
Dalton showcases the city's extensive road resurfacing and reconstruction efforts, addressing goals to continue improving infrastructure. This

includes a coordinated approach with public utilities to replace outdated water and sewer systems during road projects for greater efficiency. Significant projects include a state project that will add a roundabout to a busy area near a new high school and a Walmart store.

"We always had a lot of backup there. So, with this roundabout that should ease congestion during our high traffic hours, making it safer," says Dalton. Significant water and sewer improvements are underway at the south end of the city, with the support of state and federal funding. New Ulm has also secured federal funding to relocate the airport's crosswind runway, opening up the potential for both commercial and residential development.

Dalton points to some of the key collaborations that support the city's agenda, such as the New Ulm Partnership which coordinates economic development efforts. "They keep us all on the same page, so we're not duplicating efforts," he relays. The





city also values the presence of the local medical center, Allina. "Rural access care is always a need, and they play a vital role in our community," he acknowledges.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

In the coming 18 months, Mayor Backer says New Ulm will maintain its focus on strategic planning and addressing housing needs. She points to potential and upcoming housing projects, including conversations with several Housing and Lodging Developers, the development of the George's property, and the mixed-use project on Highland Avenue. "Because of all of the energy that we've created in New Ulm as an investment and destination for living, we have other developers that are in preliminary dialogue with us to satisfy those housing needs," she affirms.





# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ Citizens Bank Minnesota

# www.citizensmn.bank

Citizens Bank Minnesota is a community-owned and operated bank, with its main office located in New Ulm and branch offices in Lafayette, La Salle, Lakeville, Watkins, and Ormsby, Minnesota. We are a full-service bank offering personal and business products and services to fit all your financial needs. Member FDIC.

# ■ Coldwell Banker Commercial **Fisher Group**

# www.cbcfishergroup.com

Coldwell Banker Commercial Fisher Group has provided sales and leasing, property management and development services to investors, landlords and owners throughout Southern Minnesota for over 50 years. Our extensive expertise, intimate knowledge of local markets and research capabilities has earned us a reputation for service excellence and performance.

# ■ New Ulm Chamber of Commerce

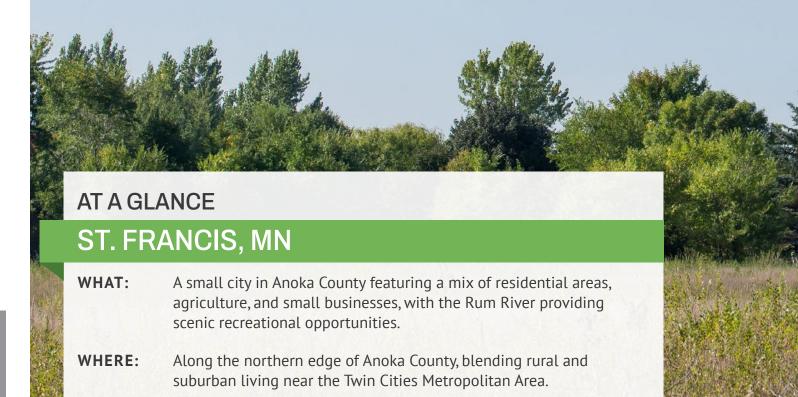
# www.newulm.com

Experience how Germans Have More Fun in New Ulm! Visit newulm.com or call 507-233-4300 for travel resources and itineraries for MN's "City of Festivals". Discover what makes our community so special! Nearby? Stop by the Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center for tips on local attractions, dining, and events.

ST. FRANCIS, MN

# URBAN MEETS NATURAL BEA

A CITY THAT EXPERTLY BALANCES GROWTH WITH AN UNPARALLELED LIFESTYLE



WEBSITE:

www.stfrancismn.org



# **CITY MEETS NATURE**

"We have a very urban core with commercial areas alongside some beautiful natural features," Thunstrom notes. St. Francis boasts a scenic river designated by the state and extensive wetlands, significant natural assets. These features add to the city's aesthetic appeal and present unique challenges for development.

Despite these challenges, St. Francis has embraced the opportunities posed by its natural landscapes, such as the wetlands and rivers, in the context of land use and development. Thunstrom explains that the city has proactively addressed these challenges by fostering creative developer partnerships. These collaborations aim to find solutions that respect and preserve the environment while meeting the community's needs.

The scenic Rum River, flowing through the heart of St. Francis, is a focal point for residents and visitors alike. It offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including kayaking, canoeing, and fishing, making it a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts. The river is also surrounded by beautiful wetlands and parks, providing a serene and picturesque setting that significantly enhances the quality of life in the city.

"We value our natural environment and work hard to protect it," Thunstrom proudly states. This commitment is evident in the city's approach to development, where environmental considerations are seamlessly integrated into planning and decisionmaking processes.

### **BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE**

St. Francis is not resting on its laurels. The city is actively engaged in several infrastructure projects to accommodate its growing population and enhance its services. A new city hall and fire station are under construction, serving as the anchor for the downtown area known as Bridge Street.

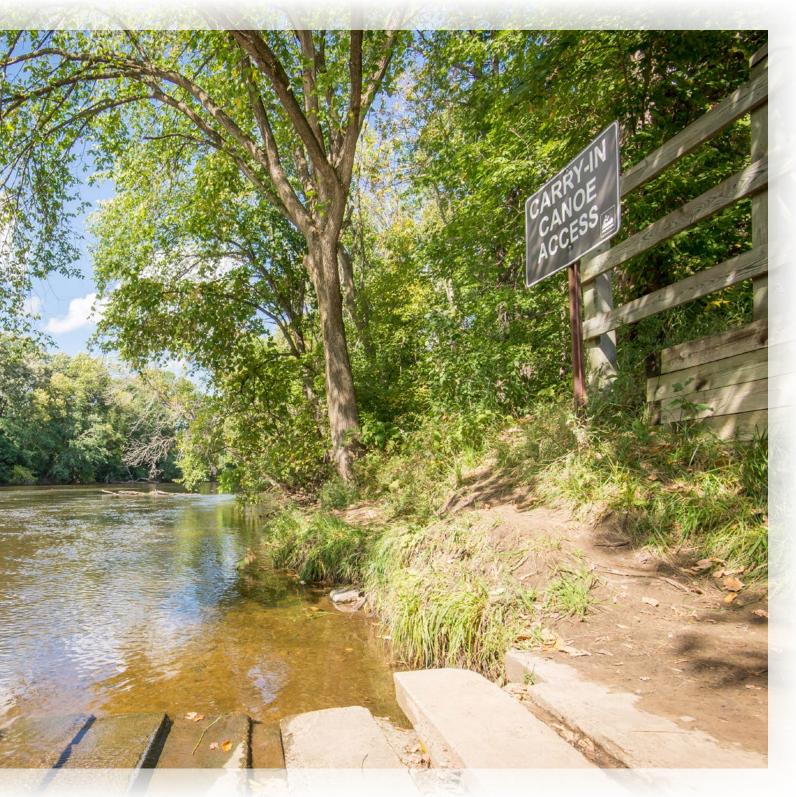
In addition, a significant senior housing project is about to break ground, adding 125 units to the community. This is part of a broader shift from predominantly residential developments to a mix



that includes more commercial and retail spaces. "We have a lot of conversations for future commercial and then a couple of multifamily housing developments as well," Thunstrom says.

### THRIVING THROUGH CHANGE

The city's proactive approach to development has been necessary in overcoming the challenges posed



by its natural features and regulatory constraints. "The city has made itself flexible when working with the developers," Thunstrom emphasizes.

For example, the city staff works closely with developers to navigate state highway regulations and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) protections. By creating open communication and innovative problem-solving, St. Francis ensures

that development projects can progress without compromising the city's natural beauty or historical integrity. The approach has resulted in a win-win situation for all parties involved.

The city's ability to adapt and find solutions is exemplified in several recent projects. One such project involves the development of a new commercial center near the wetlands. Initially,





# stahlconstruction.com

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info@stahlconstruction.com



# bruntonarchitects.com

7525 Wayzata Blvd. Minneapolis, MN 55426 507-386-7996 info@bruntonarchitects.com

# ST. FRANCIS CITY HALL AND FIRE STATION PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When the design/construction team of Brunton Architects & Engineers and Stahl Construction began working with the City of St. Francis, they were impressed with the City's clarity of purpose and long-term vision. The City knew its existing city hall and fire station could not meet its community's growth nor provide the necessary security for today's public facilities as both structures were aged with outdated systems and inadequate space for operations and staff. It also knew a shared-services facility could optimize efficiency and maximize investment and that the ideal location for it was where its existing fire station stood. The question was, would the building fit on the site and would they be able to afford their vision: a building that would serve as a cornerstone for community engagement and future development.

Leveraging Brunton's design expertise and Stahl's construction knowledge, the team determined the City could actualize their vision of enhanced fire and municipal services in one shared facility with room to expand as their population grows. The City's new and improved asset would also set the standard for a downtown corridor initiative with a gorgeous public plaza that welcomes citizens into the durable, yet beautiful precast building. When completed in Fall 2024, the 35,600-square-foot City Hall and Fire Station will include a city council chambers, training and conference rooms, a fitness room, fire bunks and day room, apparatus bays, a training tower and ample parking.

To learn more about their municipal projects, visit bruntonarchitects.com and stahlconstruction.com

# **ABOUT BRUNTON ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS**

Brunton prides itself on being responsive and accountable to our clients with designs that elevate their vision through outstanding creativity, innovation and expertise. Founded in 2007 by Corey Brunton, Brunton is a design firm that delivers working, living, serving, healing environments that not only reflect, but also uplift and sustain their clients' organizations and communities with great architecture, interior design and master planning services.

# **ABOUT STAHL CONSTRUCTION**

Founded in 1981, Stahl is a mid-size, full-service corporation providing quality, competitively priced preconstruction and construction services, with a focus on exceptional service and personal attention. They offer a range of services including commercial general contracting, construction management at risk, construction management agency, and best-value general contracting. Every structure they create is built with care by dedicated construction professionals with a wealth of knowledge and experience.



there were concerns about the construction's environmental impact. However, through careful planning and collaboration with environmental experts, the city and developers were able to design a project that minimized the impact on the wetlands while still meeting the community's needs.

# STRENGTH AND STABILITY

St. Francis benefits from a strong family-owned business base that provides stability and continuity.

"A lot of our longest-standing commercial and manufacturing seats are by family-owned business," Thunstrom highlights. The deep-rooted business community has been instrumental in the city's economic stability and growth.

Financially, the city leverages tools like Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and tax abatement to support new developments. The Economic Development Authority (EDA) also plays a vital role, acquiring and preparing



land for future partnerships. This has helped offset upfront costs for potential commercial or restaurant ventures, making St. Francis an attractive location for new businesses.

"Village Bank is strong with commercial partners," Thunstrom notes. The bank's commitment to the community and its local businesses has been a driving force behind many successful ventures in the city.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND SUCCESS STORIES

St. Francis has recently welcomed several new businesses, including a new auto parts store and a general retail outlet. Long-standing businesses such as Northland Screw and Temperature Specialists continue to thrive and are even considering expansion, which demonstrates the city's supportive business environment.

Key partnerships with organizations like the St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce and the Anoka County Regional Economic Development Group further bolster the city's economic development efforts. These collaborations facilitate events, support local businesses, and drive regional economic growth.

"The St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce is our biggest business partner locally," Thunstrom says. "They manage our smaller events within the city as well as one of the city's largest events." These events, organized in partnership with the city, foster a sense of community and support local businesses.

The Chamber of Commerce also plays a crucial role in advocating for local businesses and providing them with the necessary resources to succeed. This partnership has been instrumental in creating a thriving business environment in St. Francis.

### **EVENTS AND COMMUNITY**

Community events are vital for bringing residents together and attracting visitors. The city hosts a variety of activities that enhance the sense of community and promote local businesses. One of the most popular events is the weekly farmers market held every Wednesday during the summer. This market, which offers fresh produce, homemade goods, and artisanal crafts, has doubled participation since last year, attracting vendors and visitors from surrounding areas.

Pioneer Days, another signature event, organized by the St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce, celebrates St. Francis's rich history and heritage. This celebration features a parade, live music, food vendors, and various activities for all ages. It offers a wonderful opportunity for residents to come together and celebrate their community. "We support the chamber in organizing these events, which are crucial for our community's social fabric," Thunstrom explains.

Other events, like the annual tree-lighting ceremony in December, provide entertainment and strengthen residents' bonds.

### VISIONARY GROWTH

A significant focus is developing a business park along the state highway to attract commercial and industrial enterprises. The initiative is part of a broader strategy to provide local employment opportunities and reduce the need for residents to commute.

Additionally, the city is working on a large subdivision project that will add over 300 homes and a multifamily apartment building with 110 units. These developments are expected to meet the housing needs of the growing population and add diversity to the housing market.

"We're pushing towards more commercial and business park-type projects," Thunstrom says. "The single-family housing kind of comes naturally here, but it does take more work for us to get in the commercial."

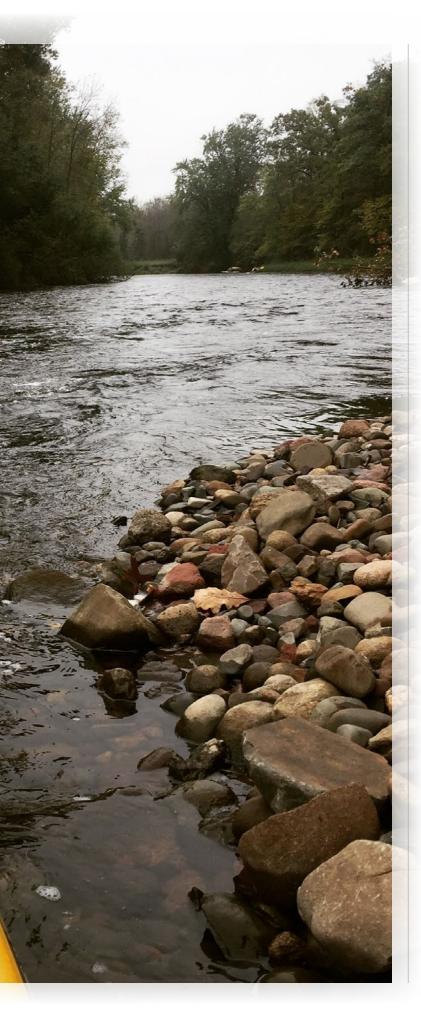
The city is also capitalizing on its proximity to educational institutions. "We've got a technical college just south of us in the city of Anoka that offers excellent high-skill training opportunities," Thunstrom points out. This enables local manufacturers to access a skilled workforce, enhancing the city's business appeal.

# **COMMITTED TO GROWTH**

St. Francis, Minnesota, is rising, blending its rich history and natural beauty with dynamic growth and development. Under the leadership of City Administrator Kate Thunstrom, the city is poised to continue its trajectory of thoughtful expansion, ensuring it remains a great place to live, work, and visit.

Exemplifying the best of small-town America while embracing the future with open arms, the city adopts a flexible and creative approach to development.





Strong local businesses and active community engagement further contribute to its appeal.

More than just a place to live, St. Francis is a community that values its past while actively shaping its future. Whether you are a resident, a business owner, or a visitor, the city's vibrant spirit and commitment to progress make it a truly exceptional destination.

# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# **■** Brunton Architects & Engineers

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# AGGOOMINE DESIRABLE PAGE

# AT A GLANCE

# **COALINGA CA**

WHAT: A self-sufficient city of 18,000 in California's Pleasant Valley

Region

WHERE: Fresno County, California

WEBSITE: www.coalinga.com

west of Interstate 5 and is surrounded by a lush

backdrop of rolling hills and natural beauty.



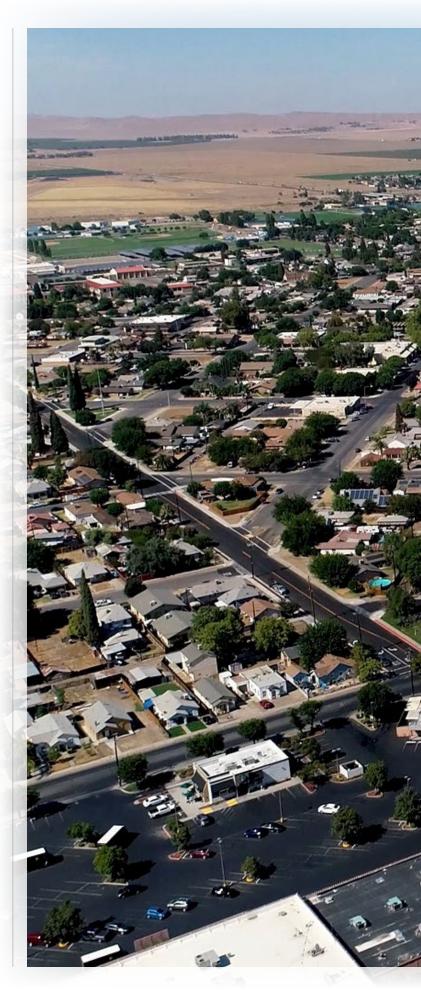
"Coalinga is the perfect definition of a quaint little community. We have strong community support and pride," describes City Manager, Marissa Trejo. "We are sort of isolated because there are no cities that butt up right against us, we're surrounded by unincorporated areas. So, we are a very self-sufficient community, and we draw from the resources we have."

Marketing Coalinga as "the most business-friendly city in the state of California", the city has compiled a list of reasons they believe this to be true. On that list is the way COVID was handled in the community, as Trejo recounts, "Our governor said that only the essential businesses could stay open. For us, in Coalinga, because we are so isolated and so independent and reliant on all of our businesses, we didn't feel that that was fair. So, our City Council adopted a resolution declaring all businesses in Coalinga as essential businesses."

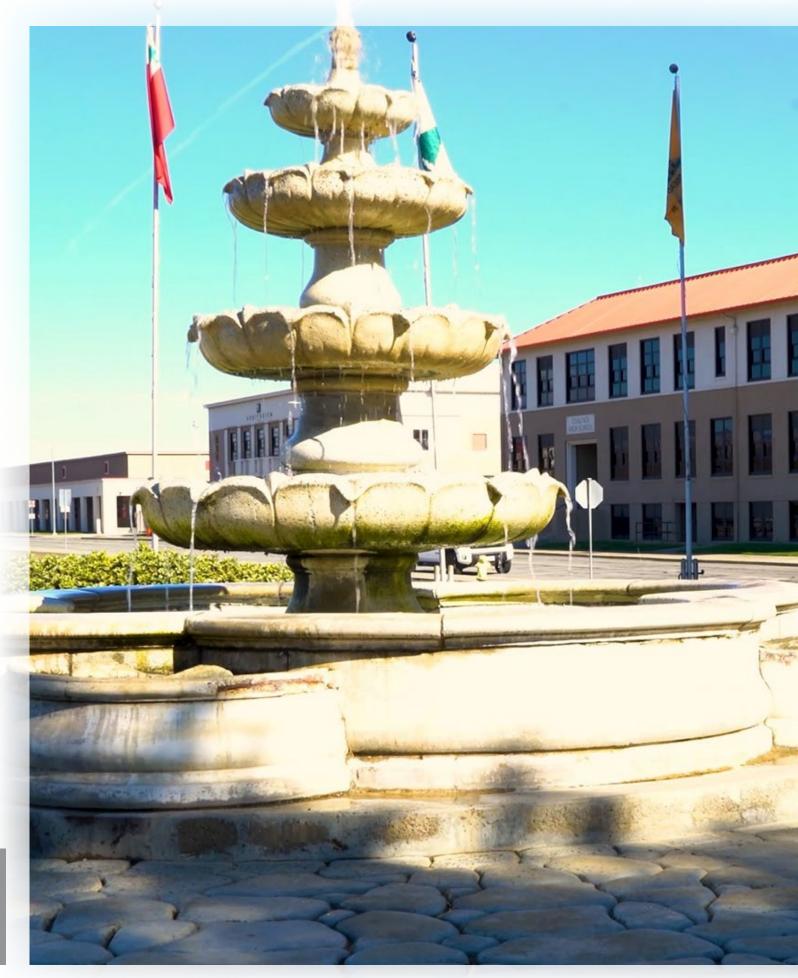
This bold act resulted in the city being denied CARES act funding for not complying, but Trejo says, "For us as a community, it was worth it. We didn't really lose businesses during COVID as many other communities did." Stressing that precautions were taken to ensure safety, she adds, "It's not like we were being careless. It's just we allowed them all to open and find ways that they could continue to stay open and provide services to the community in a safe way."

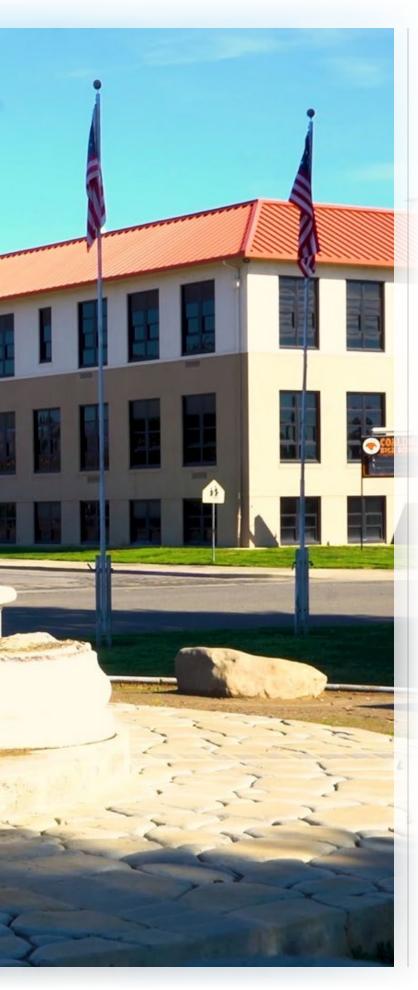
Streamlining the planning process is also part of the business-friendly environment in Coalinga, with Trejo reporting that excellent customer service is a priority throughout the city's streamlined planning and building processes. "We are a small city, so when someone comes in, if they're a developer, they don't have to deal with all these layers of city government," she shares, explaining that it is herself or the Assistant City Manager, Sean Brewer who handles all development inquiries. "I think that's nice, because we have the answers to give them rather than them dealing with entry-level staff that have to pass the project on, and then it gets handed off to the next person. Our processes are very streamlined here."

Incentives are also offered to companies who are looking at locating in Coalinga. "We don't necessarily have a menu of items for them to pick from because every business is different. We listen to them, and











then I try to see if we can develop incentives that would help them to actually open here." Small business grants during COVID, extended hours at City Hall, and flexibility towards developers are all part of the business-friendly initiatives in Coalinga. "Our city council is very pro-growth, and so if there are any fees the developer is requesting to waive, I can't quarantee that the council will approve it, but we always take it to them and let them decide if that's something they want to do or not. We really do have great customer service in the city, and that's everybody here. I think that makes us stand out as being a very business-friendly city," Trejo says.

In terms of workforce development, the community relies on a partnership with West Hills Community College, which has both a campus and a district office in Coalinga. "West Hills College is so easy to work with," says Trejo. "If we have a new industry coming to town, they will develop a curriculum to teach those employees."

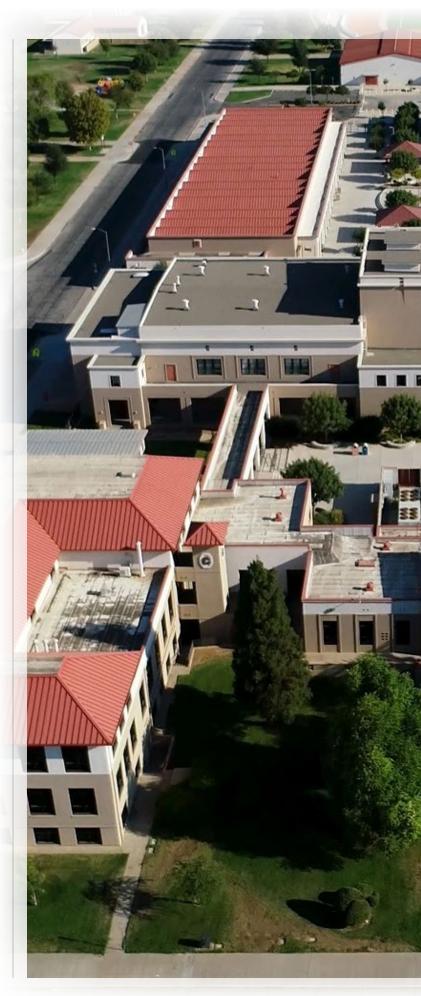
Offering the example of the psych tech curriculum brought in by the college when the Coalinga State Hospital was opened, she adds, "Anyone from the community who wants to be a psych tech can go through the program at West Hills College and then get picked up by the state hospital to be a psych tech there. That's just one example, but West Hills will do that all the time. They have regular community input meetings. They're so easy to work with and so forward-thinking. They're always available to help us create a solid workforce."

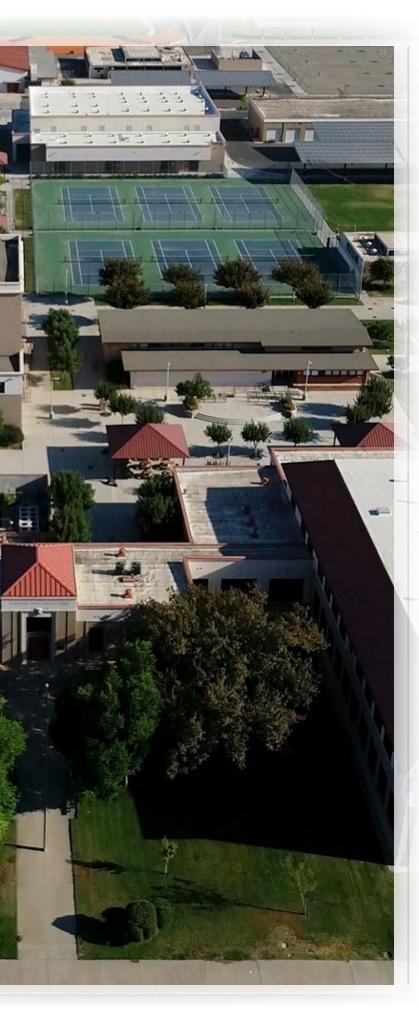
Strong partnerships with Coalinga's major employers, which include oil and gas companies, the Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga State Hospital, and Granite Construction, are mutually beneficial, as Brewer explains, "They employ a lot of people in this community, but also, when the city is in need of something, these are folks that we reach out to, and they reach out to the community when needed. So, I think there's a good relationship with all of these organizations that help the community continue to be able to move forward progressively."

Harris Ranch Inn & Restaurant, which sits outside of Coalinga city limits, is another valued community partner. As one of the first and largest "Farm to Fork," dining destinations in California, Harris Ranch offers both casual and fine dining, accommodations, banquet facilities, and a country store, and is a major employer, and a source of business to the city. As a progressive company, they are installing the largest Tesla charging station in the world, which Trejo notes is beneficial for the community.

"Harris Ranch does have a lot of things to accommodate people as sort of a one-stop shop there, and that brings people into Coalinga as well. Not only that, but if people are commuting to Coalinga from other places, Harris Ranch is only about 15 minutes outside of the downtown area, and that gives them a place to charge at a supercharger station."

On the city side, Brewer acknowledges that a significant investment in water infrastructure is necessary for Coalinga, to sustain the current system which is at least 50 years old. "We're rehabilitating some of our storage tanks that are definitely aging,





doing upgrades at our water plant, looking at innovative technologies to deliver safe and reliable drinking water, as well as looking at ways to acquire additional resources of water. In terms of drought, we are looking for other ways to be able to secure more water allocations during years of drought, to ensure that we have an adequate supply for our residents and businesses."

Road and sewer infrastructure upgrades are ongoing, as well as work on the natural gas system, which is maintained by the City of Coalinga. "We are looking at the capacity to make sure that we can support the growth that the council and the community are desiring," says Brewer. "We have to make sure that we have the capacity to be able to support that growth as well."

Looking to the future of the city Brewer asserts, "We're trying to be the most business-attractive city." We're open to any and all business at this point, in terms of trying to bring folks in, trying to diversify what's available to the community, and being open for folks that are willing to invest in this community. We have some big initiatives right now."

To put more of a focus on economic development, the city has contracted with the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation, business recruitment firm Retail Strategies, and public relations company Criscom. "All three of those are really to help us bring new businesses to Coalinga. We have sort of a target of who we'd like to bring, we definitely need more retail, we need more restaurants, we need family entertainment. We pay an annual contract fee that's pretty significant to each one of those companies because our five members who are serving on the city council are very pro-growth. So, we're making some pretty significant investments to try to bring new businesses to Coalinga," Trejo says.

With progressive planning and a friendly approach, the City of Coalinga will continue to welcome new opportunities, securing its reputation as "The most business-friendly city in the state of California."





# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ The CrisCom Company

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FILLMORE, CA

# AGRARMING F INSOUTHERN (

PROVIDING AN ENVIABLE LIFESTYLE IN AN ALREADY BEAUTIFUL STATE

AT A GLANCE FILLMORE, CALIFORNIA

**WHAT:** A charming rural community with continued growth on the horizon.

WHERE: Ventura County, California

WEBSITE: www.fillmoreca.gov





Santa Clara River Valley, Fillmore is often referred to as a "little piece of paradise." Just a short drive from both the bustling Interstate 5 and the serene beaches of the Pacific Ocean, this small, close-knit community has long been anchored by its agricultural roots.

Recently, however, Fillmore has begun to see a surge of growth, attracting new residents from surrounding cities, drawn by its affordable housing and improving school district. This classic small town, reminiscent of the fictional "Mayberry" is also recognized as a prime filming location for Hollywood movies, TV shows, and commercials.

# REVITALIZING THE HEART OF FILLMORE

Central to Fillmore's recent developments is the downtown revitalization effort, spearheaded by the Fillmore Action Team, a group of business owners in the city core.

"Last year with the ARPA funds, we provided funding for all of the businesses within our central business district to do some facade improvements if they wanted to participate," expands City Manager, David Rowlands.

The reopening of the Fillmore Town Theater has become a focal point of these downtown efforts, bringing new life to the area. The historic theater hosts comedy shows, plays, student performances, and other events, adding vibrancy and cultural richness to the community.

Rowlands notes, "Sean McCulley, who owns the theater has been a really good partner, working with us and the downtown merchants to have them grow and work with the city over the past couple of years." Mayor Carrie Broggie adds, "That theater was built in 1920. To have that open up again, that will be the hub of the downtown district."

Roan Mills Bakery is a popular new establishment in the city. "They have customers coming from over 60 miles to get bread," shares Rowlands. "They also provide a variety of high-end restaurants in Beverly Hills in Los Angeles. And they've put Fillmore on the map for other individuals to come out here and visit our area." The city is also home to a unique and diverse restaurant scene, including La Fondita, described as, "Worth the Trip to Fillmore."

In 2022 Fillmore hired the consultancy firm Retail Strategies, to put together a five-year strategic vision for the downtown area. "We're in our second year of implementation of various projects," Rowlands





recounts. "We had a new branding logo developed for the city. We've also taken a look at how we can incorporate the businesses, trying to reach out to get them involved more with city decisions that impact the downtown area."

# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR GROWTH

Fillmore is also making strides in enhancing its broadband infrastructure. An upcoming project in collaboration with Ventura County aims to bring high-speed internet access to all residents.

"This will provide access and give the city two dark fibers to use if we want to provide internet access to our residents or allow anybody else to come along and provide high-speed internet to all of our residents," expands Rowlands. This initiative, which is expected to begin by the end of 2024 is crucial in supporting new residents, particularly those working from home, who have expressed the need for reliable internet connectivity.

# ATTRACTING GROWTH AND INVESTMENT

Fillmore's business-friendly environment is underscored by its streamlined approval processes for developers. "We're very upfront with all developers and we tell them exactly what they're going to need to get a project approved, right from the very beginning," Rowlands conveys. The city is currently in discussions with developers about two major industrial sites, each featuring 150,000 square-foot buildings. "From talking with their brokers, they are very pleased with how we have responded to the request for information and our willingness to work with them," he says.

Recently the city has welcomed Rotorcraft Support Inc. to its business park. Mayor Broggie elaborates, "It's a helicopter repair company that moved from the van Nuys Airport to Fillmore. It is a tremendous operation that services helicopters from all over the world and now resides here in our own little Fillmore."

The recent success of businesses like the Red Engine Brewing Company further highlights the city's growing appeal. "They're a brewpub with some of the best pizza in the region. They do a lot of special

events at their location, bringing people in," Rowlands describes.

# BALANCING GROWTH AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Mayor Broggie emphasizes the importance of controlled growth in Fillmore, as it works with developers such as Hearthstone, Comstock Homes, and Williams Homes to bring more housing to the community. The city has seen significant residential development, such as The Bridges, a large project that reflects the community's preference for maintaining its small-town charm.

"Kevin (McSweeney) has an eye for what fits in Fillmore, and the concept of adhering to what people in Fillmore want to see," she explains, "A lot of it is just continuing with the Mayberry feel of the town. When we're talking to developers, in these residential areas, we ensure that they have that same mindset, balconies and wrap around porches and things of that sort, which is important to Fillmore. That's the look that we have, that we want to retain."





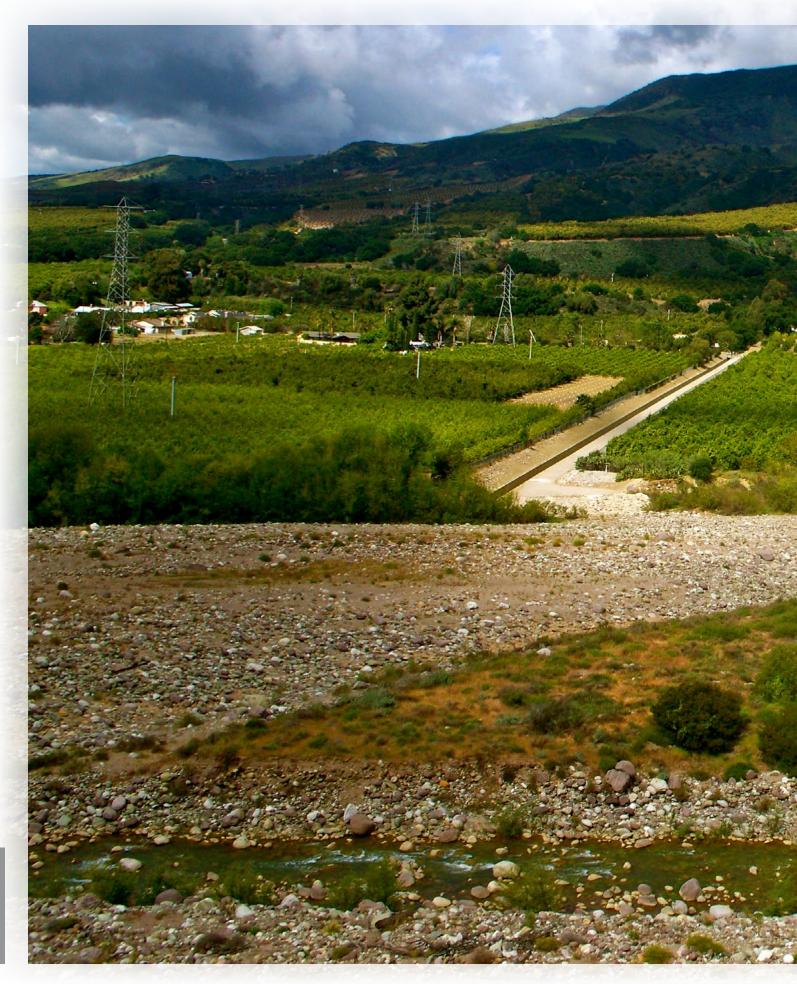




The city is also committed to providing affordable housing, successfully partnering with nonprofits like Many Mansions to create low-income housing options. "We're not talking about cement concrete apartment complexes that are going in for low income, we're talking about really pristine housing," Broggie maintains.

"This goes back to the demands that the planning department has put on developers to adhere to what the citizens want these new developments to look like. It's a beautiful, beautiful complex." In partnership with another nonprofit, People's Self-Help Housing, the community will soon break ground on another affordable housing project. Fillmore is also anticipating an upcoming development at the gateway to the downtown area. "The plan is a multipurpose development, with housing on the second floor and the commercial down below. So, there's mixed-use going in there," she relays.

Furthering the efforts to meet the needs and expectations of the community, each new







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development is required to include parks, ensuring that residents have access to green space. Referring to the Bridges community, McSweeney outlines, "There will be two parks integrated into the development, that will be maintained and paid for by the surrounding homeowners through an assessment district. One is 4.4 acres, the other one will be 8.8 acres, and it will be constructed within two to three years."

In addition, Fillmore is expanding its outdoor amenities, quided by a master bike path plan. "We're only two and a half square miles but we've constructed about six miles of bike paths," McSweeney details, noting that the new development will add another three miles of bike paths, which will be integrated into the community.

# A BRIGHT FUTURE

Looking ahead Mayor Broggie says there will be a continued effort to bring employment opportunities to the city. "The difficult part about where Fillmore



is located, despite how gorgeous it is, is that it is a bedroom community. We have proximity to LA County, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Clarita to the east. And then to the west, we have the city of Ventura, and even beyond that, Santa Barbara," she acknowledges. "People commute to work. We are trying to bring in the businesses here to the community and move away from the bedroom community status that we're

in right now, and I think we're starting to see the pendulum start to swing the other direction."

Despite its development ambitions, Fillmore remains committed to preserving its rural charm and heritage. "We are such an agricultural community, with so many ranches and farms. That will never change," Broggie emphasizes, underscoring the value of



county initiatives that protect agricultural areas and keep many residents employed.

Remarking on the exciting growth and opportunities on the horizon, she concludes, "There is nothing but good things to come down the road for us. I'm thrilled with the direction that Fillmore is headed."

# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ Comstock Homes

# www.heritagegrovefillmore.com

For more than 35 years, Comstock Homes has established a tradition of creative design, meticulous construction and careful community planning throughout California. Quality construction and superior supervision are maintained throughout the building process to ensure customer satisfaction. Talented architects, designers and craftsmen work together to create Comstock homes and communities that are nothing short of exceptional.

# ■ Many Mansions

# www.manymansions.org

Many Mansions is an award-winning nonprofit and the largest provider of affordable housing in Ventura County, serving more than 1,900 lowincome and formerly homeless residents. Many Mansions provides a foundation of stability that leads to long-term success. Visit our website www.manymansions.org or give us a call at (805) 498-4948.

# ■ Ventura County Medical Center and Santa Paula Hospital

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SOUTHERN CHARM AND RAPID GROWTH GUARANTEE A DYNAMIC FUTURE

# AT A GLANCE

# HARDEEVILLE, SC

**WHAT:** A small city known for its strategic location, rapid growth, and proximity

to major destinations like Savannah and Hilton Head Island.

WHERE: Located in Jasper County near the Georgia border, approximately 15

miles north of Savannah, Georgia, and about 20 miles west of Hilton

Head Island, South Carolina, along Interstate 95.

WEBSITE: www.hardeevillesc.gov



and poised for a bright future.

# STRATEGIC LOCATION

Hardeeville's prime location is one of its biggest assets. Positioned conveniently on Interstate 95 with two exits and a third in the planning stages, Hardeeville is ideally situated for growth. Highway 278, the major road leading to Hilton Head, also runs through the city, making it a vital artery for the 3 million tourists visiting the island annually.

"Hardeeville is the heart of the Lowcountry," says Mayor Williams. "We're perfectly located between major hubs like Savannah and Hilton Head and just a stone's throw from Charleston. This ideal location and our Southern hospitality make Hardeeville a great place to live."

# **ECONOMIC DRIVERS**

The economic landscape of Hardeeville is diverse and dynamic. Residential growth, driven by lower taxes and a desirable location, is one of the primary economic drivers. People from the Northeast, Midwest and now Western parts of the continental U.S. are migrating to Hardeeville, attracted by its favorable weather and lower cost of living.

"We're also becoming a hub for storage, logistics, and suppliers due to our proximity to the Port of Savannah," explains City Manager Czymbor. "With the port being the second fastest growing in the U.S., our strategic location is a significant advantage."

# INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

To support its rapid growth, Hardeeville has several key infrastructure projects underway. The widening of Interstate 95, a major initiative set to begin in 2025, will significantly impact the city's connectivity. Additionally, the city, Jasper County, SCDOT and private developer are working collectively to a build a new I-95 interchange, Exit 3, which will further enhance transportation infrastructure.

"The city has invested heavily in infrastructure to meet our growing needs," Czymbor notes. "This includes new fire stations, an expanded police department, a new court facility, and recreational improvements. Our 40,000-square-foot recreational center and the multi-million-dollar recreational complex behind City Hall are just a few examples."







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It is not often that a company can provide leading expertise, deep-rooted industry knowledge, and command the respect of the community it works in. For the highly regarded sitework contractor, Cleland Constructors, possessing all three traits is in its business DNA and the company has the projects behind it to prove the sector-leading position it enjoys.

In business for over 50 years, Cleland Constructors has grown to become the largest site work contractor in The Lowcountry of South Carolina, and it continues to garner new customer loyalty every year while it prepares the path to leading solutions ahead.

Specializing in clearing and demolition, earthwork, storm drainage, utilities, paving, and other key critical infrastructure services, Cleland Constructors has consistently provided long-earned experience, superior services, unparalleled knowledge, and client-focused specialization that far surpasses the local competition.

Getting the job done right the first time and ensuring the safety that is necessary for its employees and clients, Cleland Constructors will take on any job regardless of its size and complexity with the full confidence that it will produce superior results for its valued clients.

Cleland Constructors takes pride in a business that is thriving due to the hard work and dedication that it takes, while having a family-focused vision spanning over three generations. Deeply ingrained and invested in the local market, continuously ensuring the top-quality work it carries out every day, Cleland Constructors is well positioned to take on increasingly complex projects with the same vision it began its operation with back in 1970.

Providing the industry standard in site prep work for the government, military, commercial, and private residential projects, Cleland Constructors owns and operates its fleet of equipment that is carefully maintained and overseen by its highly trained staff of skilled employees.

With a friendly approach, the knowledge to back up its work, completing jobs on time and budget with client loyalty that is a testament to its unparalleled services, Cleland Constructors continues to unearth the very best services in the local market for years to come.



Moreover, the city is collaborating with the county on a transportation sales tax referendum. This proposal, which plans to introduce a 1 percent sales tax, will be released to the public for approval. The funds generated from this tax will be crucial in widening interior roads that are struggling to accommodate the rapid population growth and projected traffic increases.

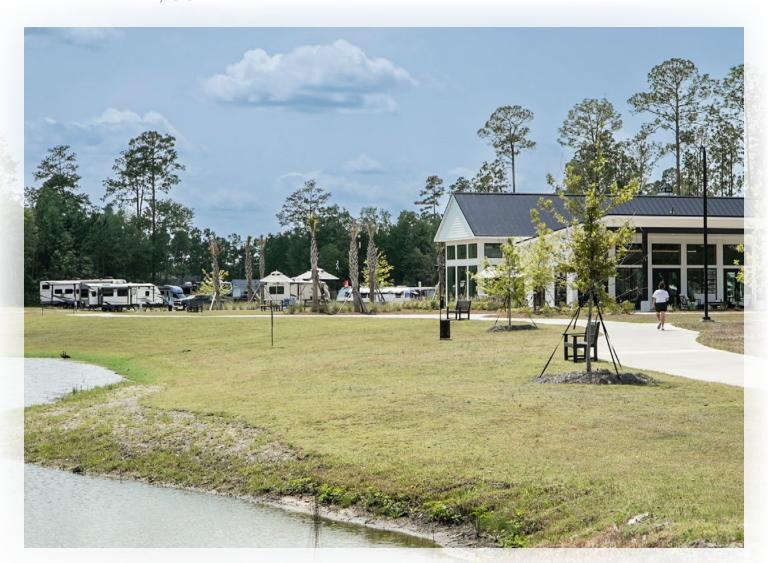
Key projects include widening the 278 corridors, the primary route for the millions of tourists traveling to Hilton Head Island annually. The initiative aims to alleviate congestion on major roadways, ensure smoother transit, and improve infrastructure to support Hardyville's burgeoning population and economic activities.

"We're also developing new pathways for nonmotorized transport, such as biking and walking," adds Parsons. "The East Coast Greenway project is part of this initiative, aiming for connectivity from Maine to Miami."

# **HOUSING BOOM**

Hardeeville's residential development can only be described as explosive. From 2015 to May 2024, the city issued 5,902 single-family building permits and 138 industrial or new commercial building permits. This translates to over 15,000 new residents, with an estimated growth to 35,000-40,000 people within the next decade.

"People are attracted to Hardeeville for several reasons," Mayor Williams says. "The weather is phenomenal, and our location is perfect. We're close to the beach, Savannah, and Charleston, with easy access to major roadways. Moreover, our lower taxes and more affordable housing options than



the Northeast make Hardeeville an attractive place to live."

# **EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Education and workforce development are crucial for Hardeeville's continued growth. The city has partnered with various educational institutions to meet the needs of local businesses and industries. The Technical College of the Lowcountry recently broke ground on a \$40 million workforce training center, offering trades and certifications to support new and growing businesses.

"About three years ago, we launched our workforce training program," says Parsons. "We received a \$350,000 foundation grant as seed money and partnered with a regional training agency. We established welding, OSHA, forklift and CDL classes and through these programs we have graduated 200 diverse adults of all ages, who have gone on to

secure life-changing jobs."

Palmetto Training, the city's partner, can offer up to 80 national certifications, ensuring a skilled workforce for emerging industries within the city and the surrounding region. Hardeeville's commitment to education and workforce development doesn't stop there. The city also supports the University of South Carolina Beaufort, which uses the city's athletic fields for their varsity programs.

"We are preparing our residents for high-paying jobs," Parsons emphasizes. "This improves their quality of life and ensures that local businesses have the skilled labor they need to thrive."

# **SMART CITY INITIATIVES**

The city is leveraging technology and innovation to drive economic growth and enhance public services. By actively using social media, Hardeeville engages

its citizens and encourages input on community matters. The fire and police departments utilize advanced systems to improve emergency response times, while the public works department has implemented a portal, "Hardeeville Hears & Helps", for residents to report issues directly.

"Hardeeville is committed to being a forward-thinking, connected community," Czymbor explains. "We're introducing an interactive digital wall at City Hall, multilingual digital kiosks, and digital signage in key areas to enhance citizen engagement and service delivery. The initiatives position Hardeeville as a tech-savvy city poised for future growth."

Additionally, the city uses real-time file sharing with vendors and contractors, streamlining project workflows and improving efficiency. A new crime dashboard provides real-time officer location tracking, gunshot recognition, and detailed crime statistics, integrating camera systems with the police department to expedite investigations.

"Our public service announcements and media initiatives highlight the benefits of shopping locally," Parsons says. "This supports our economy and fosters a sense of community."

# **TOURISM AND RECREATION**

Tourism is another vital component of Hardeeville's economy. The city's recreation and tourism department has implemented several new community festivals and events, promoting sports tourism and attracting regional visitors.

"We've spent millions on our recreational facilities," says Czymbor. "We have a turf field, baseball and softball fields, and a 40,000-square-foot recreation center with a college-sized gymnasium. We also plan a memorial park to honor our service veterans and first responders."

The city's natural attractions, such as the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge and the Savannah River, and outdoor activities at Sergeant Jasper Park also



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- Home to world famous 55+ retirement communities, Sun City and Latitude Margaritaville
- Outdoor activities for fishing, camping, golfing and ecotourism







HardeevilleSC.gov







Established as a pivotal business organization, the Jasper County Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to enhancing the economic vitality and quality of life in Jasper County, with a special focus on cities like Hardeeville.

As a centralized organizational staple for Jasper County, the Chamber helps to bridge many gaps, connecting local governments such as Hardeeville with various new and existing businesses, nonprofits, and regional entities throughout the Lowcountry.

As a community partner, the Chamber works closely with Hardeeville implementing strategies to attract new businesses while retaining and expanding existing ones, thereby creating a robust local economy.

As Hardeeville experiences rapid growth, the Chamber ensures that development is sustainable, with a balanced focus on economic, social, and environmental factors.

The Chamber continues to serve as a cornerstone for Hardeeville's growth and development, it is their invaluable support and resources that drive success and enhance the overall quality of life in the city.



draw visitors.

"Our festivals and events, such as the annual two-day Octoberfest, bring in thousands of visitors," Parsons notes. "We also have sports tourism initiatives, hosting regional meets and events at our facilities."

"We even have a dog park advertised on I-95," says Mayor Williams. "It's amazing how such a small amenity can draw people into our city."

# REGIONAL COOPERATION

Growth in Hardeeville requires regional cooperation with local municipalities, county governments, and even nearby states. The city is part of several regional initiatives, including the Southern Lowcountry Advisory Board (SoLoCo) and the Lowcountry Area Transportation Study, to address shared issues like transportation, housing, and environmental sustainability.

"In the last eight or nine years, we've focused on becoming part of the regional conversation," says Mayor Williams. "We've established regular working

relationships with our state delegation and other local governments to meet the needs of our growing city."

The city has also been actively involved in regional think tanks, transportation studies, and housing trust funds to promote affordable and workforce housing.

"Our efforts in regional cooperation have been recognized and awarded," Williams adds. "We've developed model ordinances and initiatives that address our unique stormwater and housing needs."

Parsons highlights the city's engagement with utility companies and service providers to address the pressures of rapid growth. "We're at the table with water, sewer, gas, and communication companies, working through the challenges together," he says.

# **LONG-TERM VISION**

Hardeeville's long-term vision focuses on improving the quality of life for its residents while fostering economic growth. This includes providing job opportunities, diversifying housing options, and



promoting industrial and commercial development.

"We're committed to creating economic opportunities for our residents," says Mayor Williams. "This includes job opportunities close to home, new educational initiatives, and a mix of affordable housing options." The city is also working on creating a downtown area through a public-private partnership, aiming to develop a municipal hub along US 17.

"We're envisioning a vibrant downtown area that serves as a community and commercial center," Czymbor explains. "This will enhance the city's



appeal and provide a focal point for residents and visitors."

# **EMBRACING GROWTH**

Hardeeville is not just a fast-growing municipality; it's a community that embraces its growth with a

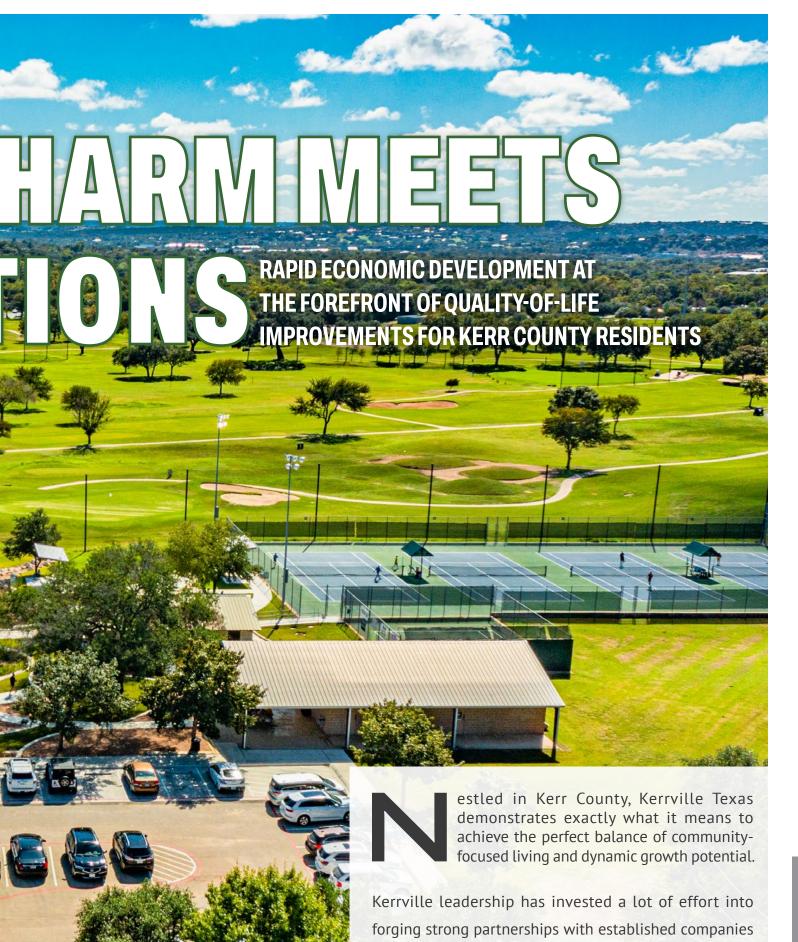
vision for a prosperous future. Hardeeville is poised to become a model city in the Lowcountry with strategic infrastructure, education, technology, and regional cooperation initiatives.

"The quality of life in Hardeeville is improving," Mayor Williams concludes. "We're building a city that our residents can be proud of, ensuring economic opportunities, excellent services, and a connected community for generations to come."

# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

- **■** Cleland Constructors www.clelandsiteprep.com
- Jasper County Chamber of Commerce www.jaspersc.org
- Hargray/Sparklight www.sparklight.com





and securing funding for its large-scale projects.

It's known for its key industries, such as advanced manufacturing and aerospace which anchor the local economy and provide high-quality jobs.

By prioritizing these sectors, Kerrville creates a stable economic base that attracts further investment and innovation.

Supporting small businesses and local entrepreneurs is a crucial priority. Initiatives like tax incentives, business retention programs, and workforce training help Kerville's enterprises thrive.

Simultaneously, comprehensive planning is essential to align land use with infrastructure capabilities.

The city constantly updates its master water, wastewater, and transportation plans to ensure that it can accommodate growth without straining resources.

Leadership is acting not just with economic development but also with aesthetics and culture in mind.

By emphasizing mixed-use developments Kerrville has invigorated its downtown areas, blending commercial, residential, and recreational spaces to create vibrant community hubs.

Kerrville's growth strategy coordinates economic expansion with quality-of-life enhancements.

The city is a successfully thriving, well-balanced community with abundant economic opportunities, robust infrastructure, and an unparalleled quality of life.

# **BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE** ONE MILESTONE AT A TIME

Kerrville has witnessed significant economic milestones in recent years, thanks to the proactive efforts of local leadership and strategic partnerships.

These partnerships are chosen for their quality above anything else. One of the most notable developments is the arrival of Megaacrete, a specialized concrete manufacturing company.



This new venture will create between 40 – 60 jobs and establish a new plant in the area, injecting a much-needed boost into Kerrville's economic landscape.

The long-term economic impact has been positive, as these partnerships have significantly provided Kerrville with employment opportunities.

"In the past three years, we've created over 1,000 primary jobs across various sectors, including



aviation, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and craft agriculture," says Kerr Economic Development Corp. Executive Director Gilberto Salinas.

The city has effectively triggered job growth in 3 out of 5 of its target industries that were determined to be the most beneficial for long-term growth.

Megaacrete alone represents a \$50 to \$60 million capital investment and will add significant value to the local economy for many years.

This company's product, a lightweight yet durable concrete 4x lighter than traditional cinderblocks, is a testament to the advanced manufacturing capabilities being developed in Kerrville.

Another success story is Killdeer Mountain Manufacturing, which has been in the community for three years and continues to expand rapidly, enhancing Kerrville's position in the aviation industry.

While it is a priority, Kerrville's leaders aren't just looking to make economic milestones. They are also steadily upgrading the city's residential amenities.

"We're building what will be called the Guadalupe River Center. It'll be along the banks of Nimitz Lake and will be a conference center. But it'll also allow us to enhance what we do on that lake, including handicapped accessibility for our community," says former Mayor Judy Eychner.

This center is symbolic of a larger intention that Kerrville's current mayor holds for the city's development.

"We're very pro-growth, pro-business, and prosustainable growth. So, we want to stay within our natural resources to make sure that the quality of life, that small-town feel, doesn't go away... it's a balancing act," says Mayor Joe Herring.

# REFINING THE RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Kerrville is also expanding its housing and education sectors to support its growing population.

The city has partnered with Lennar Homes for an initial development that will result in 134 new homes, some of which are being considered for workforce housing.

"The city partnered with Lennar to set a guaranteed price for those homes to keep it at that workforce level, and they're already working on the design of their second development which will be upwards of 500 homes," says Director of Developmental Services Drew Paxton.

This will be developed closer to Kerrville's High and Middle Schools, and there are even plans to convert

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# RREAF HOLDINGS CONTINUES TO EXPAND INTO KERRVILLE MARKET

RREAF Holdings, a privately held commercial real estate firm based in Dallas, Texas, has been a critical player in the industry for 37 years. With a proven track record, RREAF operates under five main divisions catering to middle America: value-add multifamily acquisitions and development, opportunistic hotel and resort acquisitions, ground-up development (housing and leisure), highly amenitized master-planned developments, and acquisition and re-development of RV Resort Communities.

Recognized for its robust portfolio and strategic developments, RREAF Holdings sees immense potential in the Kerr County market. Kerrville, the county seat of Kerr County, is a scenic city in the Texas Hill Country, known for its environment, culture, and growing economy. The city's appeal to residents and developers make it an attractive destination.

Kerrville has experienced a surge in demand for housing due to increased net migration, favorable cost of living, status as a popular retirement community, and allure to young professionals and families seeking a high quality of life. This growing demand has outpaced the available housing supply, creating a significant need for new, quality residential developments.

RREAF Holdings has already made a substantial impact on the Kerrville housing market. The 2018 development of a 120-unit apartment community, Sendero Ridge, marked RREAF's entry into the region, providing much-needed housing options and setting the standard for future projects.

Committed to bringing more inventory to the ever-evolving Kerrville market, RREAF Holdings focuses on developing properties that meet the community's needs. With RREAF currently owning two sites in Kerr County totaling ~240 acres and its long-standing expertise and innovative approach to real estate development, RREAF Holdings is well-positioned to address the increased housing demand in Kerrville.

a former school site into a mixed-used space, once again following Mayor Herring's intention to develop with the citizens in mind.

Retail expansions will also accompany these housing projects, further stimulating the local economy and providing residents with more shopping and dining options.

Kerville's local university is playing a pivotal role in the city's development with its newly introduced programs, including an aviation program, and the establishment of a college-level football team. The aim of the city is always to ensure that the right programs fit with the outlined needs of the community.

Additionally, the city has made significant efforts to address and enhance its childcare capabilities.

"We've worked with some of our local childcare institutions and created the Kroc Center which recently launched its childcare program," Salinas explains.

These initiatives not only enhance educational opportunities but also contribute to the community's cultural and recreational life, attracting students and visitors to Kerrville.

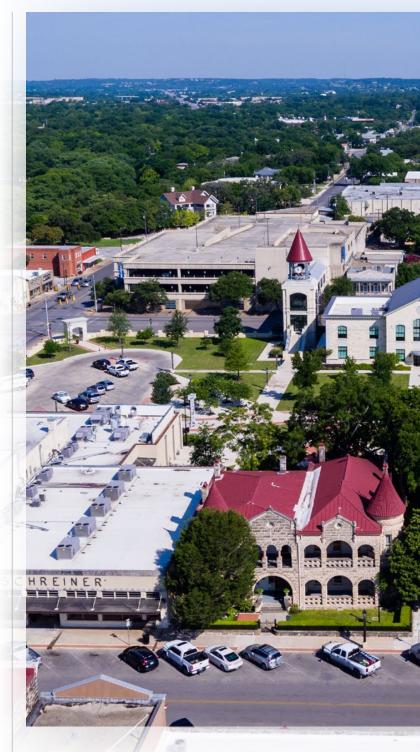
Housing and education are important, but that is only half of the residential experience. The other half is public safety and infrastructure.

Another major project underway is the construction of a new public safety building, which is expected to be completed within the next year and a half.

This facility will enhance the capabilities of local emergency services, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Kerrville residents.

Additionally, the city is updating its Water and Wastewater Master Plan to include new areas of development near Nimitz Lake.

"It ties with the comprehensive plan, so it'll incorporate the existing water and wastewater plan," Paxton confirms, mentioning that the same location-



focused strategy is being integrated into master area plans for other city sectors, namely downtown.

# SECURING THE ECONOMIC HORIZON

Kerrville is increasingly becoming a hub for corporate headquarters. Companies like James Avery, Mooney International, and the HEB Foundation have chosen Kerrville as their base of operations.



This strategic positioning is attracting more businesses to the area, contributing to the economic diversification and resilience of the community.

Kerrville leadership is doing everything possible to supplement the influx and expansion of business within the city.

Kerrville's Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

program plays a crucial role in supporting local industries.

Through partnerships with state agencies and organizations like the Texas Workforce Commission, the BRE program facilitates workforce training and other expansion needs.

Companies such as James Avery and Fox Tank have benefited from these initiatives, helping to sustain and grow local businesses.

Workforce challenges are a common issue across many sectors, and Kerrville is no exception.

This is why Mayor Herring's plan for Kerrville's development is so community and culture-focused.

Leaders of smaller cities have the advantage of being able to know much more about their residents' lifestyles than what's possible with larger cities.

These initiatives aren't just aimed at growth, they are aimed at growth that the city of Kerrville especially needs, it is tailored growth.

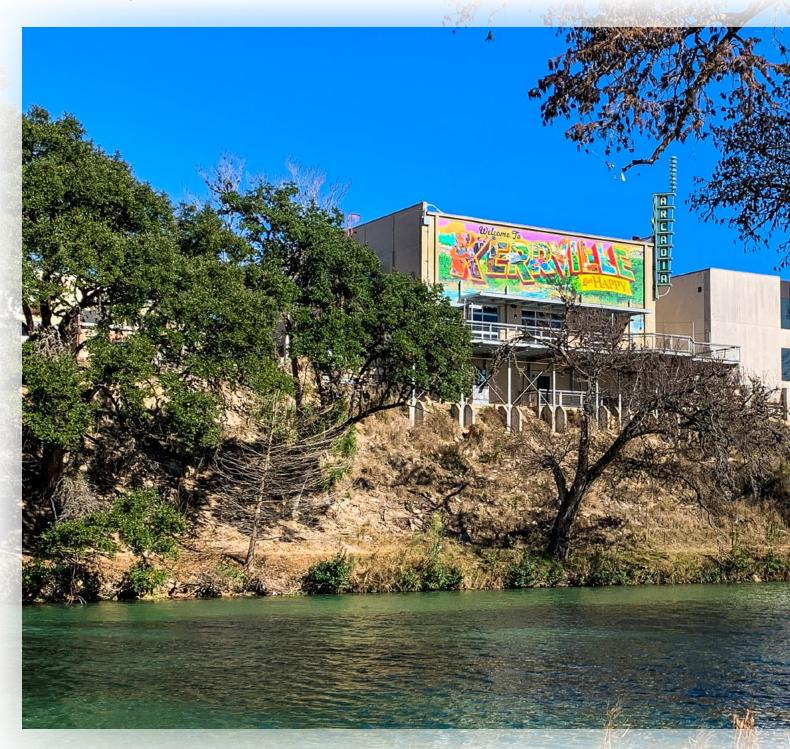
For example, the new housing developments by Lennar Homes are designed to be affordable for middle-class families, providing the critical mass needed for local industries. Mayor Herring, along with Council member Jeff Harris were able to get the roads in the subdivision named after local fallen veterans from the first and second world wars.

The efforts to expand childcare facilities further support this, ensuring that working parents have access to reliable childcare services.

When combined, the result is a clear message from the city to its residents that it will do everything it can to make living comfortably and affordably as easy as possible.

Kerrville's economic development strategy includes attracting companies that are capital-intensive but require fewer employees.

Megaacrete exemplifies this approach, with its high-value jobs attracting residents who currently



commute long distances for work.

This strategy helps retain the existing workforce within the community, supporting both economic and social stability.

Moving forward, with so many key economic developments soon set for completion, infrastructure remains a key area of sustainability.

Much like the recent updates to the water and wastewater master plans, the city's leaders will continue to identify areas needing investment, ensuring that the city's growth does not overextend past its capacity and population.

While it might seem that rapid upward growth is 100% a good thing, if the city does not have the workforce or supporting services to sustain that growth, it will ultimately end in decline.



Kerrville's growth and success are driven by a combination of strategic economic development,

community-focused projects, and a commitment to

maintaining the area's quality of life.

With continued investment in housing, infrastructure, and education, Kerrville is well-positioned to thrive in the coming years.

The community's proactive approach ensures that

it remains a charming, desirable place to live while embracing new opportunities for economic and social advancement.

As Mayor Herring says, Kerrville's journey will continue to be a balancing act between small-town values and big-city initiatives.

# PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

# ■ RREAF Holdings

# www.rreaf.com

RREAF Holdings strives to provide America with superior affordable workforce communities throughout its various platforms. Our goal is to utilize our experience, creativity and financial capabilities to acquire, develop, own, manage, reposition, and financially engineer real estate assets for our residents, quests and investors.



# WEREHSTO MODERNGE

COMBINING ITS HISTORICAL CHARM WITH AMBITIOUS DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO CREATE A THRIVING, FORWARD-LOOKING COMMUNITY.



# **CITY OF KINGS MOUNTAIN**

**WHAT:** Thriving small city blending historical charm with modern

development

WHERE: Kings Mountain, North Carolina

WEBSITE: www.cityofkm.com



and Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Jim Palenick, the City Manager, elaborates on the historical significance that lends the city its name. "We take our name, Kings Mountain, from the most important Revolutionary War battles fought at Kings Mountain in South Carolina, which is very near here, still maintained as a national monument and park."

He also highlights the city's robust infrastructure and services, which contribute to its self-contained nature and proximity to the rapidly growing regions of Charlotte and northern South Carolina, injecting a dynamic energy into the local economy and community life. "It enjoys outdoor recreation and is influenced a lot by all the growth and activity going on in the Charlotte region and northern South Carolina," Palenick notes.

## REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN KINGS MOUNTAIN

In the heart of Kings Mountain, the downtown area serves as a historical and economic hub that the city is actively revitalizing. With a blend of rich history and modern development, efforts are underway to enhance the area's appeal and functionality.

"We have a historic older downtown typical of smaller, self-contained communities like this," says Palenick. "It has a great deal of history, a lot of attractive older buildings with small retail, restaurants, things like that." The city recently initiated a multi-phased streetscape improvement project to rejuvenate the downtown area. Palenick mentions, "We completed the first phase. We expect to do phase two this year, and then we're going through a master plan that will look at multiple additional phases in the future, probably as many as five or six."

The Development Services Officer Matt Blackwell details one of the critical projects. "The City of Kings Mountain is preparing a site in our downtown that is publicly owned by the city," he explains. "We're preparing and marketing that site to attract additional hotel space via a potential boutique hotel." This addition aims to provide much-needed accommodation and bolster the local economy. "It would not only provide for additional economic development downtown but also support businesses and our other recreation and entertainment opportunities by providing folks a place to stay downtown."



# RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The City of Kings Mountain is on the brink of significant growth, with projects designed to expand the housing market, invigorate the local economy, and enhance the community's overall appeal.

"The city has been great," says Steve Bailey, President of Prestige Land and Site Works, a local developer. "We have a 150-lot subdivision called Brinkley Ridge that just opened. There was a ribbon cutting a week



or two ago, and it's currently one of the only actively selling subdivisions with many lots." Partnering with America's largest homebuilder, D.R. Horton, Bailey highlights the immediate success, "They've had several sales right out of the gate and remain very optimistic about completing the project over the next couple of years."

Bailey elaborates on the housing market specifics. "These homes are in the \$350,000 to \$450,000 range. We were recently zoned for another subdivision called Lacey Orchard, which includes a mix of 400

townhomes and single-family detached homes. We hope to sell these homes in about 18 months to two years."

In addition to residential growth, commercial opportunities are being integrated into the development plans. Bailey points out, "Lacey Orchard also has a nine-acre commercial center that will front Highway 74 business. We are excited about this mixed-use development, which will bring various product types to the area."

# MORE NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN KINGS MOUNTAIN

Kings Mountain's growth continues with several large-scale projects to redefine the city's landscape, blending residential, commercial, and recreational spaces and creating a cohesive environment supporting a thriving community.

Paul Sparks of Insignis Partners discusses their latest venture. "It's been great working with Jim and his team," he says, noting the seamless collaboration through transitions. The 384-acre Dixon Ridge project, rezoned under Palenick's leadership, demonstrates this effective partnership. "It's going to be a mixed-use development, primarily heavy residential. There will be a walk-up multifamily component, three stories, office space, and flex warehouse areas," Sparks explains.

Strategically located near the Catawba Two Kings Casino, Dixon Ridge will serve the community and the casino's operational needs. "The flex warehouse will cater to casino vendors, helping with machines and other necessities," Sparks, notes. This proximity promises a symbiotic relationship between the development and the casino, nurturing economic synergy.

Sparks also reveals plans for Catawba Village, another ambitious project comprising 92 acres plus an additional 40 acres directly across from the casino. "While we can't disclose specific details due to NDAs, we have several high-profile restaurants and experiential tenants interested," he shares.

Kings Mountain's future looks promising, and it plans to incorporate the Gateway Trail into these new



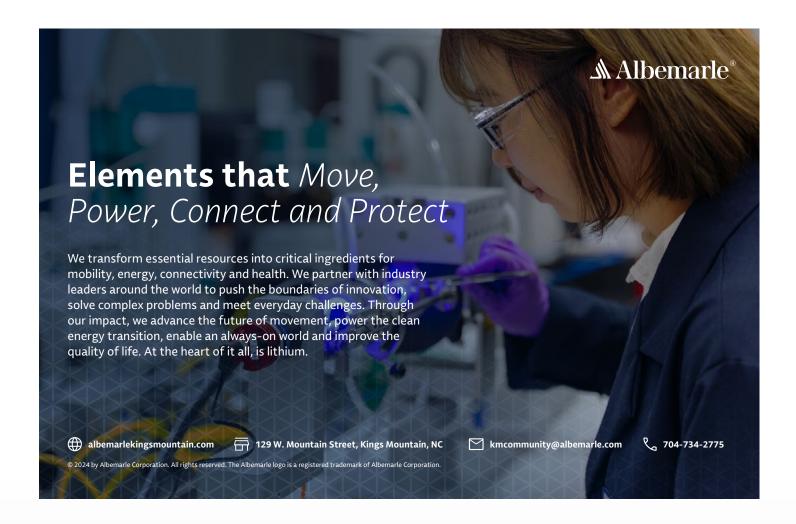
developments. "Our goal is to create a true live-work-play environment," Sparks states. Collaborating with Kiersten Martin and the Albemarle Corporation, they envision outdoor spaces that connect the community and enhance the overall livability of the area.

# ENHANCING GREEN SPACES AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

Kings Mountain's ongoing developments focus on residential and commercial growth and enhancing outdoor spaces to improve community connectivity and livability. Kirsten Martin, Albemarle Corporation's community relations lead for North America, outlines the company's significant role.

"Albemarle has proposed reopening a hard rock lithium mine that was operational from the '30s to the '90s," she explains. "As part of that, there is an 80-acre easement that Albemarle gave to the local Gateway Trail in 2008. As we reopen the mine, we want to ensure we can replace that section of trail."

The mine's potential reopening has revealed numerous opportunities to collaborate with local developers and the city to expand the trail system. "We found that there were a lot of opportunities to work with local developers, work with the city directly, and expand the trail in a really incredible way," Martin says. This expansion aims to integrate



# ALBEMARLE KINGS MOUNTAIN: TRANSFORMING ESSENTIAL RESOURCES INTO CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Albemarle leads the world in transforming essential resources into critical ingredients for mobility, energy, connectivity and health. Headquartered in nearby Charlotte, NC, Albemarle has a global reach as a leading provider of lithium, bromine and other essential elements. The demand for lithium is growing at an exciting rate, driven in large part by the increasing global demand for mobile devices, electric vehicles and grid storage.

Albemarle's King's Mountain facility is one of the most sophisticated advanced lithium material sites in the world, encompassing the entire lithium ecosystem, from process technology and development to conversion. It also hosts a state-of-the-art research and development center, featuring a world-class facility for battery materials synthesis and testing.

In addition, Albemarle is taking steps to redevelop the proposed Kings Mountain Mine, which idled operations in the 1990s. As one of the richest lithium bearing spodumene ore deposits in the world, the proposed mine would provide a valuable domestic source of lithium.

We are committed to building resilient communities and investing where we operate to support safe, healthy and economically vibrant regions. To date, Albemarle has contributed more than \$2 million to community initiatives in the area.

To learn more, connect with us at albemarlekingsmountain.com.

the trail more deeply into the community, creating a seamless connection between new developments and existing neighborhoods.

# STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS AND LONG-TERM VISION

Kings Mountain's appeal to investors lies not only in its strategic location but also in its forward-thinking approach to development. With its proximity to Charlotte and substantial investments in infrastructure, the city is an attractive hub for residential and commercial projects.

Phil Dee, Managing Partner at True Spec Global LLC, discusses what initially drew his company to Kings Mountain. "What brought us to Kings Mountain initially was the proximity to Charlotte. Fifteen years ago, we started investing in various projects here," he explains. One such project is a residential development on the north side of town, focusing on easy access to the 74 bypass. "It'll be 140 homes in the \$450,000 to \$600,000 range, aimed at the commuter market from Charlotte."

BRINKLEY RIDGE

Now Selling in Kings Mountain
New Homes from the mid \$300s

Community Pool - Included Features Smart Home Technology

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Dee emphasizes the strategic nature of their investments, including land banking for future commercial development. "We've assembled a 20-acre parcel on US 74 for a future grocery store commercial site. Once we have the rooftops, we can develop that." The influx of new residents, spurred by other developments in the area, will eventually support this commercial growth.

The city's substantial investment in infrastructure is another key factor in its attractiveness to developers. "That's why we can build here," Dee emphasizes. Combined with quality-of-life factors like proximity to parks and Moss Lake and easy access to Charlotte Airport, Kings Mountain offers a compelling package for investors and residents alike.

### INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

City Manager Palenick outlines the extensive infrastructure projects currently underway. "The City of Kings Mountain is unique for our size in that we own and operate almost every utility you can think of," he says. "We have a municipal electric utility,



1017 Phifer Road Kings Mountain, NC 28086 DRHorton.com (980) 372-2434 a municipal gas utility, water and sanitary sewer, and solid waste. And we own our water reservoirs, including a 1600-acre lake."

One of the cornerstone projects is an \$83 million sanitary sewer enhancement and improvement initiative. "We are completely rebuilding and expanding a 6-million-gallon-per-day sanitary sewer treatment plant," Palenick explains. This project involves extending force mains by nine and a half miles and gravity mains by another eight and a half miles. "In doing that, we are not only providing capacity for the future but opening up a lot of lands that otherwise wouldn't have been developable," he adds. This expanded capacity directly benefits major projects like Dixon Ridge and areas around the entertainment district and casino resorts.

Additionally, Kings Mountain is nearing the completion of a \$13 million expansion of its electric utility. "We're adding an additional substation delivery point and several miles of transmission, connecting it to the grid," Palenick notes. Water infrastructure

is also a significant focus. "We're enhancing our reservoir and bringing back a public beach along with other amenities," he says, emphasizing the city's focus on capitalizing on utility infrastructure and recreational opportunities.

### **ENRICHING TOURISM AND COMMUNITY LIFE**

Tourism is pivotal in Kings Mountain, driving economic growth and community engagement. The city is leveraging its unique combination of historical charm, natural beauty, and vibrant cultural events to attract visitors and provide memorable experiences.

Susan Mosk, Marketing and Tourism Manager, explains, "Tourism is huge. We are trying to create an alluring destination among the mountains, greenways, and lakes. "Inside the city, we have great amenities like the Joy Theater, built in 1949 and currently renovating to restore its original look. It's very active with dramas and plays."

Mosk also highlights how the city is maintaining and enhancing public spaces. "We have a beautiful





Visit martinmarietta.com to learn more.



park downtown, right off Main Street, with a water feature, a large amphitheater, and spaces for concerts, live music festivals, and children's programs," she explains. The park's proximity to the city's dining and entertainment district makes it a central hub for community activities.

The city's appeal includes nearby attractions such as a winery with a vineyard overlooking the mountains and an upcoming distillery. "This summer, we're opening a distillery with beautiful views of the mountains," Mosk adds. These unique offerings make Kings Mountain a perfect getaway for visitors looking to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life.

Palenick chimes in by mentioning upcoming large-scale touristic developments like the casino resort and entertainment district. "We believe that exit five here in Kings Mountain, within 20 years, will be the most visited spot in North Carolina," he asserts. The \$700 million casino resort, featuring a 404-room high-rise hotel tower and a two million square foot casino, is expected to attract millions of visitors annually across the region.

The city's vibrant event calendar also contributes significantly to its tourism appeal. "We have a rich history with the Battle of Kings Mountain and our Revolutionary Fourth Festival," Mosk says. The



festival includes a battle reenactment, complete with qunfire and fireworks, making it a favorite among residents. Another cherished event is Mountaineer Day, a celebration of the community's heritage with live music, festivals, and old-fashioned contests like beard growing and apple butter churning. "People really enjoy it," she notes.

With all these various initiatives at play, Kings Mountain is poised for a vibrant future, skillfully merging its rich historical roots with cuttingedge development and strategic investments in infrastructure. The collaborative efforts between city leaders, developers, and community stakeholders

are paying the way for sustainable growth, ensuring residents and visitors benefit from enhanced amenities, recreational spaces, and cultural events. This dynamic blend of tradition and innovation positions Kings Mountain as a premier destination in North Carolina, promising a thriving, inclusive community for years to come.

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

### ■ Albemarle Corporation

### www.albemarlekingsmountain.com

Albemarle Corporation leads the world in transforming essential resources into critical ingredients for mobility, energy, connectivity and health. We partner to pioneer new ways to move, power, connect and protect with people and planet in mind. Our world-class resources with reliable and consistent supply of lithium and bromine allows us to deliver advanced solutions for our customers.

### ■ D.R. Horton

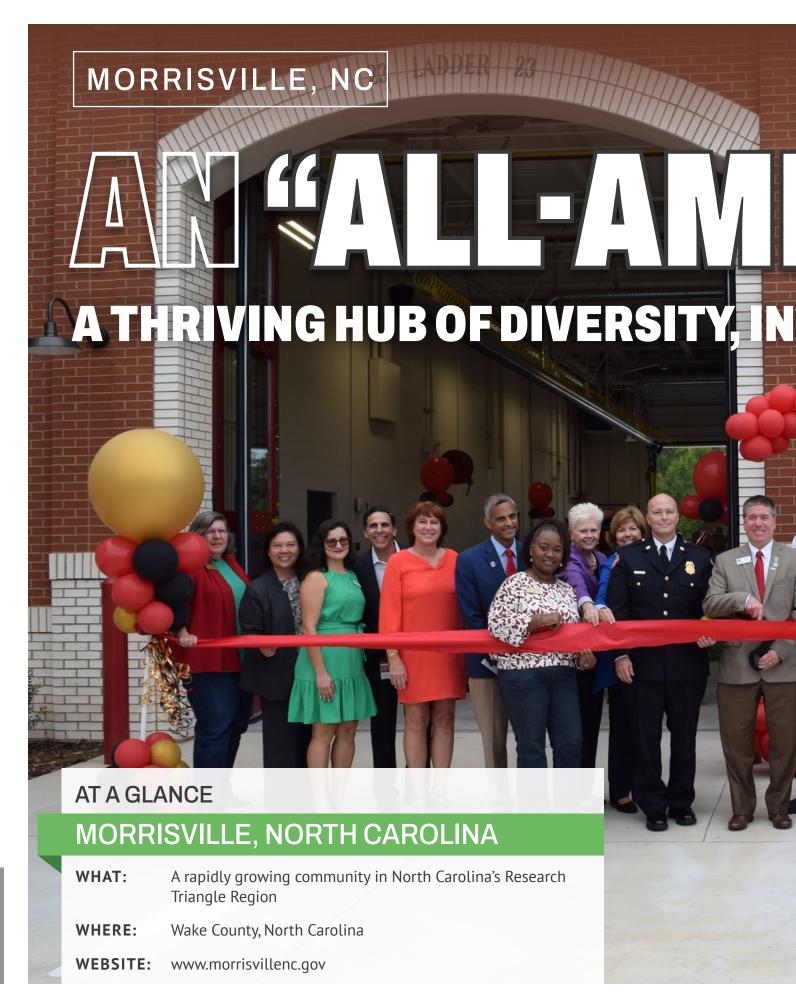
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From our first home in 1978 to over 1,000,000 homes in 2023, our mission remains the same - to deliver quality and affordability across the country. Since 2002, more people have chosen D.R. Horton than any other builder. We have homes for every stage in life in over 30 communities throughout the greater Charlotte area.

### ■ Martin Marietta

### www.martinmarietta.com

A member of the S&P 500 Index, Martin Marietta is an American-based company and a leading supplier of heavy building materials. Through a network of operations spanning 28 states, Canada and the Bahamas, dedicated Martin Marietta teams supply the foundational resources on which our communities thrive and grow.





diversity, connectivity, and quality of life, resulting in the warm, welcoming atmosphere that residents experience and cherish.

Conveniently located in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park (RTP) region—an area encompassing the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, Morrisville is equidistant from three major universities- NC State, Duke, and UNC-Chapel Hill. Wake Technical Community College's RTP campus is in Morrisville, and its service to Morrisville residents and the business community helps to enhance educational opportunities, support economic and workforce development, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. Combined with its proximity to major transportation hubs, the municipality offers the perfect blend of small-town charm and metropolitan amenities, embodying the town's philosophy: "Live connected. Live well."

### A MOSAIC OF CULTURES

"Approximately 46% of our residents are of Asian ancestry, and of that 34% are Asian Indian, which makes it a very diverse and welcoming place," depicts Mayor TJ Cawley. This diversity is celebrated through various initiatives, including the town's language access plan, which ensures key documents are available in Hindi and other languages. "We also host 22 special and cultural events each year to recognize our diversity and to introduce different portions of our community to one another and their traditions, celebrating what makes us so unique," adds Town Manager Brandon Zuidema.

Community engagement is a priority, and Morrisville hosts a variety of special happenings throughout the year, bringing people together through events like the SpringFest festival, Red, White & Boom! on July 3, and S'Morrisville every August, where the town gathers for fun activities and a chance to enjoy the delicious S'mores treat. An international festival showcases Morrisville's many cultures, drawing residents and visitors alike.

### **ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE**

Morrisville's economy is thriving, as Mayor Cawley expands, "It's bolstered by strong natural growth in our tax base and robust development activity, particularly in the life sciences industry." He talks





about the \$1 billion Spark LS Pathway Triangle project, which will bring a 109-acre, mixed-use, life sciences campus to Morrisville's McCrimmon Parkway, further solidifying the town's position as a hub in the region. These projects are part of a broader trend bolstered by federal support to bring manufacturing and technology back to the United States.

On the high-tech side, Forge Nano Battery recently chose the town for its manufacturing site, drawn to the availability of an educated and skilled workforce. "With those universities and Wake Tech nearby, there is constant upskilling of different things as the market changes so quickly. We are ideally suited to make sure that there's always the workforce necessary for our companies to continue to grow," the mayor asserts. "We're embracing high-tech manufacturing and life sciences, and it's because the workforce is so strong in this area."

### **EMPOWERING MORRISVILLE'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

Michael Haley, executive director of Wake County Economic Development and senior vice president of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce reports that Morrisville's economic development efforts, which are coordinated with Wake County, boast a pipeline of projects. "In terms of companies either expanding or wanting to come to the area, right now we have 38 active projects, these are prospects that we've had communication within the last 30 days," he says.

"That accounts for about \$10.8 billion in potential capital investment and about 13,000 potential jobs with an average salary well above the county average wage." Through initiatives like the "Work in the Triangle" campaign, the county continues to attract top talent to sustain this growth trajectory. Executive Director Haley asserts, "Talent is the differentiating factor here, based on our education, and higher education ecosystem. That's the number one reason that companies want to be here."

Along with large international companies in the realm of life sciences, technology, and advanced manufacturing, Morrisville and Wake County are supporting entrepreneurs and innovative startups.



"That growth is occurring across the entire spectrum of business and business types. There's just so much opportunity that lays in front of us right now," Haley stresses.

When it comes to supporting local enterprises, Rose Cornelius, president of the Morrisville Chamber of Commerce, points out the chamber's efforts to support a strong economy in the town, gearing programming towards small businesses, including a certification workshop for historically underrepresented enterprises, allowing them to qualify for municipal and other government contracts. She says, "To have a healthy economy, all of our businesses have to be healthy. So, we're pushing out programming and services to make sure that is the case."



### STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

In a county that is welcoming 54 new residents every day, Morrisville's growth is meticulously planned, with a focus on sustainable development and quality of life. The town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) and land use plan have been updated, paving the way for significant commercial growth, such as the Spark LS and Pathway Triangle projects.

While prioritizing growth, Morrisville is also working to maintain the character of the community. "We know that the reason we are a great place to do business is because we are a great place to live. That's in large part why Apple chose our area, because it's such a great quality of life for families, and our families place education highest in their priority list. So, we do everything we can to support the school board, and our county commissioners, who are responsible for education," Cawley portrays.

### **COMMUNITY CHARM AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

Detailing the colorful murals on display throughout the town, Cornelius underscores the ongoing efforts to hold on to the friendly spirit that makes Morrisville so special. "These billion-dollar projects going in, they are mixed-use, they will be walkable communities," she remarks. "It's not going to be building after building after building. We're fostering a community. Even on our life sciences campuses, it is going to be a community of people."





Morrisville is also set to establish its first designated downtown area, transforming a blank canvas into a vibrant hub. Zuidema shares an exciting public-private partnership that will see the development of a town center, featuring a green space with a stage for entertainment, the expansion of the existing farmers market, and the introduction of new boutique-style retail options.

"Our council has had a vision for the better part of 20 years to build a downtown that will be a destination for others to come and visit, to give a place for our residents to come and to be able to relax and have

amenities," he relays. "A lot is going on to create that downtown, and to maintain that feel that Morrisville is still as much of a small town as we can be."

The municipality also continues to invest in its recreational facilities, boasting seven parks with a variety of amenities, including a world-class cricket pitch, racquetball, tennis, and pickleball courts, miles of interconnected greenways, and a state-of-the-art aquatics center. A senior center is another popular feature of the town. "We're happy to serve our seniors," says the Mayor.



"We are very intentional. We heard that they wanted more benches along our greenways, so we added those. I'm proud of how responsive our staff is to the wants and needs of our community."

### SUPPORTING GROWTH

Morrisville is balancing infrastructure and housing development to meet the needs of its growing community. Recent investments include a \$4.76 million budget allocation for key projects such as roadway improvements, an innovative smart shuttle service, and the introduction of new overpasses in key areas. "That will significantly enhance connectivity



and accessibility for our residents and our businesses," acknowledges Cawley.

In terms of housing, Morrisville is focusing on mixed-use and multifamily developments, affordable housing initiatives, and seeking out potential partnerships with organizations like Habitat for Humanity to provide affordable housing. "It's a unique challenge to us, based on the quality of the people here, their education, and their income," admits Zuidema. "It's not traditional affordable housing, it's more about workforce housing and trying to make housing available to the folks that live here and work for the town, our first responders, our teachers, others that may not make that higher level salary that makes Morrisville affordable. We want them to be able to live here and contribute to the community outside of their work time."

### **FUTURE FORWARD VISION**

Looking ahead Mayor Cawley says "Our strategic vision focuses on sustainable growth, enhanced quality of life, and leveraging technology to foster





innovation and community connectivity. We're committed to transparent data-driven metrics to quide our progress and ensure alignment with our long-term goals."

Top areas of focus include transportation improvements, leveraging social media and inperson outreach to enhance community connectivity, and expanding recreational and social services. In summary, he emphasizes. "We are all embracing our strategic plan, and bringing forth things that are going to make life better for our community."

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

### ■ Morrisville Chamber of Commerce

### www.morrisvillechamber.org

The Morrisville Chamber of Commerce is a membership-driven organization dedicated to promoting business growth, enhancing economic and community development, and improving the quality of life in Morrisville and Wake County. Founded in 1990, it represents over 300 member companies and supports more than 28,000 local employees in the Triangle area.

MOUNT AIRY, NC

# 

A CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT TOWN WITH A DYNAMIC FUTURE TO ENJOY

AT A GLANCE

### MOUNT AIRY, NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT:** A quaint rural community, renowned for its connection to

Andy Griffith's Mayberry.

WHERE: Surry County, North Carolina

WEBSITE: www.mountairy.org



what we have come to understand is it goes way past the Andy Griffith Show, although that's where the origins come from," depicts Mount Airy Mayor, Jon Cawley. "The Mayberry idea now is about a quality of life. A simple way of living that might be quaint, but it's filled with good vibes and hope."

# PRESERVING AMERICA'S HOMETOWN WHILE EMBRACING GROWTH

Mayor Cawley reflects on the town's ability to offer a nostalgic journey back to a time of kindness and simplicity. "We want to be the best small town in America. We look at ourselves as America's hometown," he says. He emphasizes that in Mount Airy, this spirit is not just for show- it's part of the city's identity.

The city is working to balance this idyllic small-town charm with the challenges of maintaining a tourist attraction, and a growing city. "We've got water lines and sewer lines that are nearing 100 years old. So, we have to continue to upgrade our infrastructure," Cawley acknowledges. He adds that the city is constantly working on efforts to support tourism, from encouraging shop owners to open during convenient hours, to finding additional parking for visitors to the city.

City Manager, Darren Lewis, shares that along with the Mayberry connection, Mount Airy is becoming a sought-after location in its own right. "People enjoy small rural communities, and are looking for those destinations, whether that's to live or to visit," he explains. "By all means, we will open our doors for the 500,000 visitors, and we would love for them to move to our area."

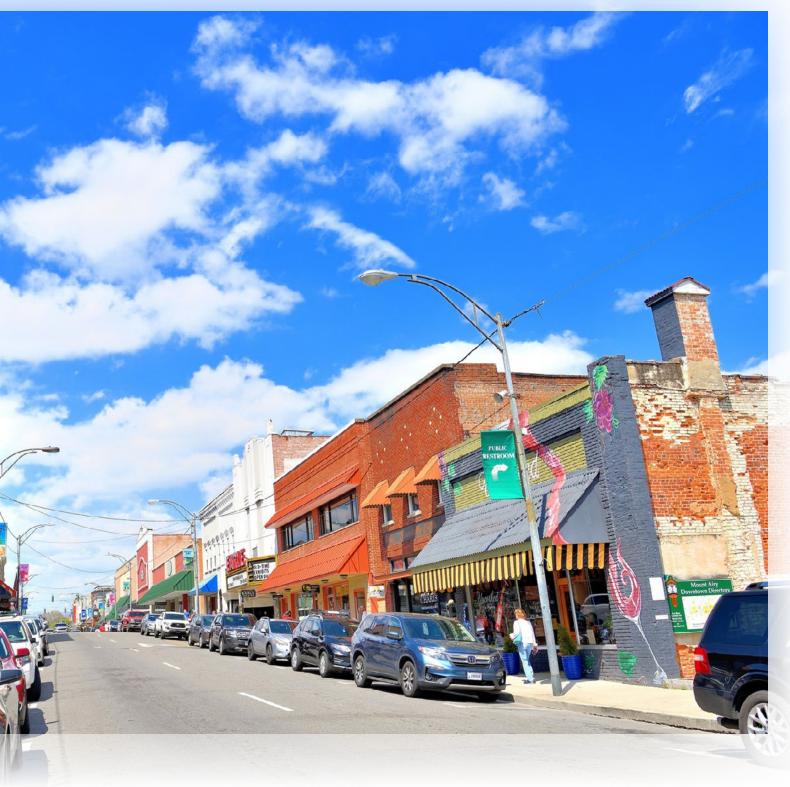
Lewis shares that Mount Airy is also a certified Retire NC retirement community and has been recognized as a livable community through the American Association of Retired Persons network. "One of our focuses is that we want to be a community that supports people of all ages and abilities, by offering quality facilities and amenities, and improving quality of life for everyone here," he details.

### A DOWNTOWN TRANSFORMATION

Mount Airy is in the midst of several infrastructure



projects, including the development of a convention center, a \$16 million project that is currently in the planning stages. Lewis depicts, "This is going to transform Mount Airy, it's going to complement the Mayberry feel and bring a different audience to our community." The hope is to attract small conventions during the week, opening the center up for performances on the weekends, and catering



to the tourist crowd. "It could be used as a wedding venue, or for high school reunions. It can be open to many, many different things. We want to capitalize on it, and we hope that we are best utilized seven days a week. That would be our goal," says Lewis.

The convention center will be located in an area known as the Spencer's Mill Development site, which will also be the home of the Mount Airy Visitors Center. In addition, Sun House Hospitality is renovating a historic mill, transforming it into a Marriott Tribute Hotel, an investment of \$25 million. "It is the first tribute hotel in the state of North Carolina," boasts the mayor. "They chose the name, Balladeer, not just because of our musical heritage. There's a lot of origin to bluegrass music in this part



of North Carolina. But the word balladeer doubles as a word that means storytelling. And of course, that's what made the Andy Griffith Show so compelling, is that they saw the story in the normal common way of living."

On the corner of Franklin and Willow, one block from the city's historic Main Street, streetscape improvements will also be implemented. Lewis recounts, "We will be burying some power lines, improving sidewalks and accessibility, and updating our largest public parking area, which is adjacent to the convention center. We envision this being the thoroughfare to historic Main Street for our tourists and for the individuals that are going to be here visiting."

Mayor Cawley adds, "We're probably going to make it a one-way street. So that we don't have gridlock coming up to Main Street when the convention center releases the 150 to 200 cars that might be in there." There will also be efforts to widen sidewalks on Franklin Street, to enhance the walkability of the downtown. "We are looking at making that area a lot



more inviting aesthetically, adding some benches, and a tree or two," illustrates Lewis.

# WATER LINE UPGRADES AND GRANITE CITY GREENWAY EXPANSION

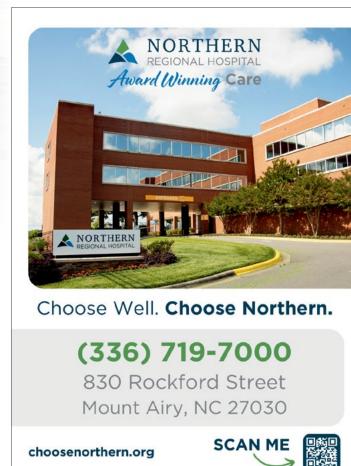
The city has secured funding to replace the aging water lines along its historic Main Street, a project valued at over \$2 million. Additionally, Mount Airy received \$4 million to expand a recreation area known as the Granite City Greenway, a paved eightmile course that will connect the community, and all four Mount Airy city schools, providing a safe and

scenic route for pedestrians and cyclists. "This is a 10-foot wide paved path that runs basically in the middle of our city, which is utilized by visitors and residents," Lewis describes. "For a community, our size to have a little over nine miles of Greenway is unheard of."

#### **GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Mount Airy is facing a housing squeeze, exacerbated by the popularity of the community, and the short-term rental potential. Mayor Cawley details, "We've got a lot of out-of-town investors that are buying houses and turning them into Airbnb's because they're always full. So, we have a whole lot of situations in which we have to find the best opportunity. They're not so much problems, as it is just other people seeing that this is a place they want to be. So, then we've got to figure out how all of that fits together."

To help address this issue, Surry County formed a housing summit, which successfully brought together developers from the local area and across the state. "We showed them the need for affordable





housing or market-rate housing in our community," conveys Lewis. "It has spurred the interest of some large developers across the state." He shares that one developer is planning to create 100 additional houses in the community. Although the property is currently just outside the city limits in Surry County, the developer intends to request annexation to access Mount Airy's water and sewer services.

On the subject of water, Lewis asserts, "Mount Airy is so fortunate to have a plethora of water. We have the capability of treating eight and a half million gallons of water per day. Currently, we're using about two and a half million gallons, so we have an excess of six million gallons of water available each day. This is a resource that we want to promote to area, state, and nationwide businesses that may have an interest in relocating or expanding their business."

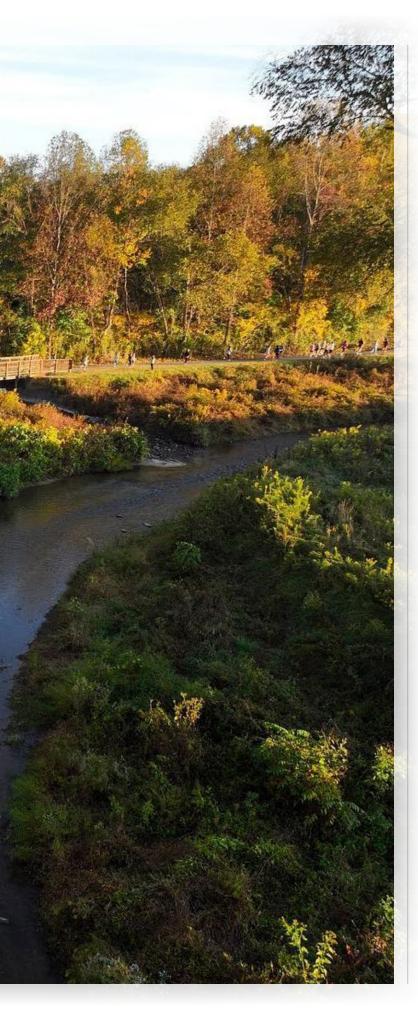


### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Looking to the future, Mount Airy is courting a major investment from a company considering a \$70 million to \$100 million project. This investment would be the largest in the town's history and promises to create jobs and significantly boost the local economy. "We are spending a lot of brainpower and energy to make that happen so that we can win that opportunity," highlights Mayor Cawley.

Lewis says the next few years will see the completion of the downtown transformation projects, along with continued business attraction efforts. He states, "It is our goal to continue with the economic development, not only in our downtown area but to have some site-ready projects located in our community. So, if a company wants to expand, or relocate to Mount Airy, to benefit from our plethora of water, or just to be in a small, vibrant rural community, we want to





make sure that we are ready when they're ready."

As a city that cherishes its past while eagerly embracing the future, Mount Airy stands as a testament to what a small town can achieve with vision and dedication. As Mayor Cawley aptly puts it, "Mount Airy is Mount Airy because of her ability to enhance relationships and see the beauty of the story in those relationships."

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

### ■ Northern Regional Hospital

### www.choosenorthern.org

Northern Regional Hospital, a CMS-rated 5-star facility, is committed to growth and community engagement. Supporting its 1,000 employees, it invests over \$350,000 annually in healthcare academic pursuits. Recognized for excellence, Northern is a primary stroke center, listed among Becker's Top 100 Great Community Hospitals, and has been named among the Best Places to Work by the Triad Business Journal for four consecutive years





Mayor Ronnie Currin shares, "Our region is very economically strong. Wake County is now the largest county in North Carolina. Just being a part of that sets the framework of being able to have a good economic landscape here in town." Rolesville is currently engaged in long-term planning, with an emphasis on comprehensive land use strategies, and capital improvement projects, to ensure future growth is well-managed.

He notes that the town's isolated location north of the Neuse River, means there are limitations on development, which align with efforts to retain the characteristics of the quaint community. "We're trying to keep the small-town charm that a lot of people like. So, in doing that, we're trying to keep our streets small, we're not planning for major highways and those types of things. We're planning for maybe three-lane roads and smaller roads, a lot of walkability, a lot of biking," he depicts.

### **RECLAIMING MAIN STREET**

One of the key elements of Rolesville's growth strategy is the revitalization of its downtown area, which was located on US Highway 401 going through the town. In 2016 a bypass was built, redirecting the highway around Rolesville, and providing a chance for the community to reclaim Main Street.

"We're lucky in that sense that we get to create almost from a clean slate, a downtown area," conveys Economic Development Director, Mical McFarland. "In the past, you would have seen many fast food restaurants, auto parts places, and gas stations, because it was a highway. Now we're trying to attract those smaller businesses, boutiques, shops, sit-down restaurants, and things like that."

An investment of over \$23 million is being put towards revitalizing Rolesville's downtown area. Fred Smith Company has been hired to implement a streetscape improvement project, which will include new ornamental streetlights, public benches, trees, and enhanced walkability features. "Kind of some hardscape and softscape," McFarland details.

"Throughout Main Street, we will have new crosswalks and new medians. Within some of those, there'll be planters and some natural features, native







plants and rocks, and things like that. We are not only improving the roadway to make it safer, but also the aesthetics of Main Street, to create that downtown feel, and that sense of place here in Rolesville."

### INTENTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

McFarland highlights two significant mixed-use development projects, Wallbrook and Cobblestone Village, noting "These are ongoing and under construction, and they serve as bookends to our Main Street." Wallbrook, developed by Crosland Southeast from Charlotte, will feature a Publix grocery store, 140 townhomes, and over 265,000 square feet of commercial space which is expected to attract restaurants, shops, and service establishments.

The northern end of Main Street is home to Cobblestone Village, a project by KDM Development out of New York, offering 55,000 square feet of retail



and restaurant space, along with 188 apartment units, creating a lifestyle-centric, walkable development. "Cobblestone village is on land that was once owned by the town that we sold to that developer," he reports.

"We worked with them for a few years to pursue that vision of Main Street as a walkable, mixed-use development."

### **ZONING UPDATES AND BALANCED GROWTH**

Planning Director, Meredith Gruber, discusses Rolesville's strategic zoning efforts which are intended to support all types of growth in the town. Offering the example of the former Pine Glo building, previously an industrial site that is transforming to host indoor and outdoor recreation, she states, "The owner/developer came in and asked to change it to a General Commercial Conditional Zoning District. Of course, the town was very supportive of changing that zoning because having that commercial zoning on Main Street fits our vision."

The site is now poised to become Glo on Main, a mixed-use development featuring family-friendly sports facilities, dining options, and event space. Rolesville is also seeing an increase in medical services to the community. "We had one or two before, and now we have several along Main Street, and our residents are excited about that," she says, adding, "I think we are also looking for a bigger, more substantial medical user."



"We are just about to kick off updating our comprehensive plan, and that future land use component will be critical for Rolesville," Gruber acknowledges. "Our current future land use map isn't functioning well enough for us because it was last done in 2017. We're looking at a specific residential density to keep that small-town charm. However, we also need rooftops to bring in more commercial and nonresidential development."

The current land development ordinance includes zoning districts that mandate a balance of commercial and non-residential development alongside residential projects, promoting balanced lifestyle opportunities.

### **RESIDENTIAL OFFERINGS**

Mayor Currin highlights the town's housing dynamics, where the tax base ratio is 92% residential and only 8% commercial. "We don't have to focus on neighborhoods, we don't have to focus on attracting residential. It kind of comes naturally in Wake County," he maintains. "We get all types, from single family, apartments, and also townhouses, we have a blend of all and that's not a big issue." He adds that the area of focus is on providing affordable housing options.

Along with this, Rolesville is working to attract workforce and veteran housing, and options for seniors. "Our population of senior citizens has grown, so we're working at 55 and over communities and trying to facilitate those. And we're trying to be attractive to veterans who have special housing needs," says the mayor.

Rolesville currently has several neighborhoods in various stages of planning and development which Currin estimates will add another 2000 or more single-family homes to the community. He points out that according to recent data, these approved housing developments have the potential to increase the town's population from about 11,000 to at least 22,000.

### AN EDUCATED WORKFORCE

With proximity to the research triangle area, and renowned institutions like UNC Chapel Hill, Duke University, and NC State, the town is well-positioned.





"Rolesville has a highly talented workforce and an educated population, we're ranked high statewide," boasts McFarland. "The percentage of our population that has a college degree is 67%."

Along with the robust university system, Rolesville partners with Wake Tech Community College to ensure a trained and skilled workforce. "We're also part of the Wake County school system, and they are award-winning every year," he expands.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT**

Given its proximity to Raleigh, Rolesville partners with the larger city for essential services like water and sewer. In terms of other utilities, McFarland says that electricity in the area is supplied by Duke Energy and Wake Electric, while Dominion provides gas services. Additionally, Wake County assists with stormwater management for the town.

For broadband connectivity, Rolesville is wellserved by major providers such as Spectrum and CenturyLink. More recently, Ting Internet has been installing high-speed fiber in the area, offering onegigabyte upload and download speeds. "We do have good broadband connectivity here, for the work-athome customer and people that have home-based businesses," touts McFarland.

### RECREATION AND FUTURE PLANS

Over the last few years, the town has been diligently revamping its Parks and Recreation Department, focusing on leadership and resource allocation. With up to 2,000 participants last year, Mayor Currin shares that Rolesville boasts one of the best youth sports programs in Wake County and is working to add amenities to accommodate this success. He elaborates. "We have a 116-acre site that we're proposing to do. In this year's recently-approved budget, we have \$12 million to start phase one of that site, which will put some facilities in there for Parks and Recreation."

In other initiatives, Rolesville has long integrated greenways into its planning, ensuring neighborhoods are interconnected, and providing residents access to opportunities for walking, biking, and running.

As for future infrastructure, the town is addressing





its expanding staff needs with plans to build a new fire station, police station, and town hall within the next four years. "Our staff is growing all the time, we are doubling every 10 years if not more, and we don't have facilities for that," he explains. "As we grow, we recognize that we can't stay the way we are. We have to add staff people, and we have to add facilities for them. And in doing that, we want to make sure that we're adding facilities that are very nice and a good environment for our employees."

With this friendly and proactive approach, the town of Rolesville is poised for continued growth and prosperity, ensuring a vibrant future for its residents and community.

### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

**■** KDM Development

www.cobblestonevillagerolesville.com

PISCATAWAY, NJ

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HEADING TOWARDS A VIBRANT FUTURE WHILE HONORING A PAST STEEPED IN TRADITION

AT A GLANCE

**PISCATAWAY, NJ** 

**WHAT:** A historic township known for its diverse community, strong

economy, and home to parts of Rutgers University.

WHERE: Located in Middlesex County, central New Jersey, and is part

of the New York metropolitan area.

WEBSITE: www.piscatawaynj.org



Corcoran, Supervisor of Planning and Community Development; and Jim Clarkin, Township Attorney—reveal a vivid picture of a town that seamlessly blends its historical roots with a forward-thinking approach to growth and innovation.

#### A HISTORICAL HAVEN

"Piscataway has a deep and rich history in this country, being the fifth oldest municipality in New Jersey and the 50th town in the United States," Wilk highlights. "It has the notable distinction of having the first national 4th of July celebration in 1778." The historical depth provides a strong foundation for the Township's identity.

"General Washington, with his colonial army, was headquartered in Piscataway during the Revolutionary War, with troops on both sides of the Raritan River. After defeating the British at the Battle of Monmouth, the colonial army celebrated the first national 4th of July here in Piscataway, setting a precedent for future celebrations," Wilk includes.

"Piscataway has transformed from a historically rich community into an economic powerhouse," Mayor Wahler adds. "We have become home to two of the five biggest data centers in the United States and we're key in the telecommunications sector, housing many recovery sites for Wall Street."

#### **ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURAL GROWTH**

The Township's strategic location near New York City and major transportation routes like Route 287 and Route 18 have been essential for economic development. "Our location and proximity to key roadways are why we're seeing such a spark in economic development and redevelopment," Johnson notes.

Piscataway's transformation from a telecommunication hub to a diversified economy is noteworthy. "We have morphed into sectors like pharmaceuticals, logistics, scientific research and development, and food science," Mayor Wahler explains. "Our 30-year business plan has evolved into a new plan that will guide us for the next 20 to 30 years."

One of the standout projects in Piscataway's





economic development is the Rockefeller Group's redevelopment of an old petrochemical site. "The site, once owned by Dow Chemical and Union Carbide, is now one of the largest logistics sites in central New Jersey," Mayor Wahler states. "They reconstructed major roads around the site without taxpayer dollars, transforming some of the worst streets in our community."

The Township's commitment to infrastructure development is evident. "We have 27 road projects under engineering design right now, probably the most of any town in central New Jersey," Mayor Wahler declares. This includes the reconstruction of Centennial Avenue, a major commercial corridor. "We're constantly updating our circulation element of the master plan, incorporating bike lanes, sidewalks, and other improvements to enhance community livability," Corcoran elaborated.

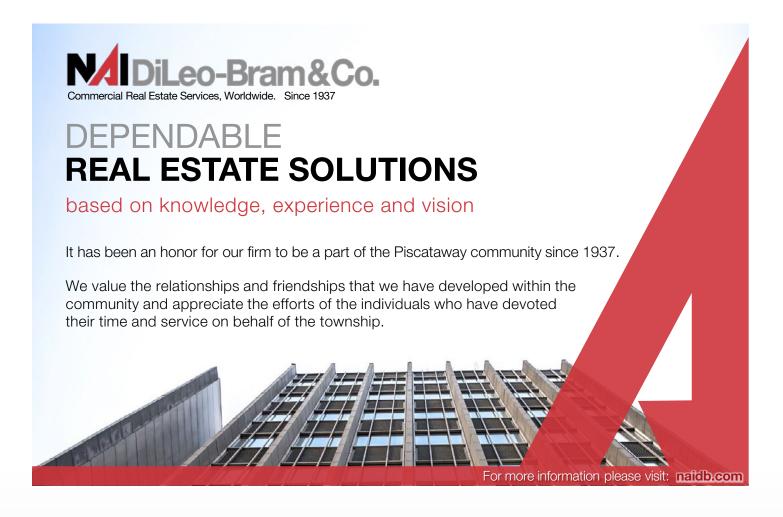
#### BALANCING GROWTH AND COMMUNITY

Balancing commercial and residential growth is a priority. Clarkin emphasizes the importance of repurposing obsolete buildings and creating new residential spaces, including affordable housing. "We are developing strategies to repurpose buildings that are now obsolete, whether offices or older hotels. We focus on creating a balance between logistics centers and residential areas," Clarkin explains.

One significant project is the former Ericsson property, a 117-acre piece of land along Hoes Lane. Clarkin describes it as "the Township's last opportunity to create a downtown." The vision includes mixed-use buildings, senior housing, and pedestrian-friendly areas. "The project will take several years, but it promises to transform the Township," he adds.

#### SENIOR AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVES

Addressing senior housing needs is another key focus. Clarkin shares details about a new senior housing project on South Washington Avenue, offering various housing options from single-family homes to condominiums and apartments. "The project is located across from our prospective ecological park, providing a passive recreational area for seniors," Corcoran adds.



#### A LONG-TIME CORPORATE NEIGHBOR

For every small business there's a story worth knowing. At NAI DiLeo-Bram & Co. (NAIDB), that story starts with John DiLeo in 1937 and the creation of DiLeo Realty & Insurance Associates in Piscataway. Today, the township stands out for being the 87-year home of NAIDB, one of Piscataway's longest corporate neighbors.

Transitioning from a start-up to a full-service commercial real estate firm under Victor DiLeo, who helped transform the region's agricultural roots into a dynamic center of commerce, NAIDB has evolved into a full-service New Jersey-focused firm in its third-generation under Rob DiLeo, who assumed the company reigns in 1990.

In 2008, DiLeo Realty Associates merged with Eric Bram & Co. to establish NAIDB, one of today's most-prominent commercial real estate firms crediting its success to long-standing, decades-in-the-making relationships. Putting its customers' and clients' needs first has been a core value, defines the firm's identity and sets a clear path for continued growth.

As part of its commitment to remain agile – and highly successful in its fourth generation – NAIDB specializes in commercial properties throughout Piscataway and six other North/Central New Jersey counties. By leveraging the NAI Global Network, the firm pivots to meet each clients' ever-changing needs locally, nationally and globally.



The senior housing project is part of a broader initiative to ensure all residents can access suitable housing. "In addition to our existing independent senior living facility, Sterling Village, we're creating three different housing products for our seniors. Small single-family homes, condominiums, and rental apartments will ensure seniors have choices that suit their needs," Clarkin explains.

"Many seniors love our active Senior Center and want to stay in Piscataway, but need to downsize," Mayor Wahler adds. "These new housing options allow them

to remain in the community near their families and the amenities they love."

#### ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESSES

Piscataway employs various strategies to attract new businesses. Mayor Wahler highlights the Township's favorable tax policies, including payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements that provide financial predictability for businesses. These agreements help businesses secure financing by offering a clear multidecade tax timeline, which is crucial for large-scale investments.

The goal is to repurpose obsolete buildings and create modern spaces that attract innovative businesses. Transforming old office buildings into residential units is particularly attractive under the new affordable housing regulations.

#### **CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Piscataway's cultural diversity is a great source of pride. "The Township is about 37% Asian, 20% African American, 14% Hispanic, and the rest are white, non-Hispanic," Wilk explains.

"We celebrate all significant cultural events, raising flags and holding celebrations to honor the diverse backgrounds of our residents," Mayor Wahler states.

The Township's commitment to cultural diversity also extends to its recreational programs. "All of our Township youth recreation programs are free, allowing children from all walks of life to participate and build friendships," Wilk says. "This inclusiveness is vital in fostering a strong sense of community."

## INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Piscataway is also making strides in sustainability. Mayor Wahler stresses the importance of solar energy and efficient water usage for the Township's data centers. "Telecommunications and data centers require a lot of power and cooling. We work closely with utility companies to ensure that we have the necessary infrastructure to support these facilities, including triple power redundancy and low sewer rates," he describes.

The Township's planned ecological park is another example of sustainable development. "It will provide a passive recreational area for residents and is a key component of our green initiatives. It is designed to be pedestrian-friendly and encourages outdoor activities," Corcoran shares.

Piscataway's focus on sustainability is also evident in its redevelopment projects. "We prioritize projects that include green building practices and energy-



efficient designs. This benefits the environment and attracts businesses that value sustainability," Mayor Wahler states.

#### RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL **ATTRACTIONS**

Piscataway offers a variety of recreational and cultural attractions that draw residents and visitors alike. The Township is home to SHI Stadium where Rutgers University football and other Big Ten sports are played. Both Rutgers basketball teams call Piscataway their home at Jersey Mike's Arena and the men's team will highlight a top five national recruiting class. Numerous events are also hosted at the historical village, East Jersey Old Town Village, which attracts visitors yearly.

The Township is expanding its recreational amenities to meet the needs of its residents. In response to the community's growing interest in the sport, pickleball courts are being added to many parks. The park system is a significant achievement, with at least one of the twenty-seven parks within easy walking distance from any home in the Township.

The Piscataway Community Center opened almost four years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic and has become a central activity hub. Its growth has far exceeded all expectations – with over 13,000 members, the center offers a wide range of programs and has become a must-see venue for elected officials across the state. It was built without residential tax dollars, using redevelopment fees to finance the construction.

#### **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

Public-private partnerships play a crucial role in Piscataway's development strategy. All redevelopment projects represent a collaboration between the government and the private sector. The Township works closely with developers to refine plans, prepare financial agreements, and ensure that projects meet public and private interests.







#### Where Faith & Learning Connect

Preparing our students to *Think Critically*, *Live Biblically*, and *Lead Courageously* in the world



These partnerships have been instrumental in attracting significant investments to the Township. PILOT agreements play a key role in securing financing for large projects. These agreements provide financial stability and help businesses plan for the long term, ensuring they can secure the necessary funding.

## EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Piscataway's partnership with Rutgers University extends beyond economic development. The Township collaborates with the university on educational programs that benefit local students. "Rutgers University has a program that mentors disadvantaged students from eighth grade through high school, providing them with the opportunity to attend Rutgers with their tuition covered," Mayor Wahler shares.

The Township also supports initiatives like Popcorn for the People, a company that employs individuals



on the autism spectrum. "This program provides meaningful employment and contributes to the local economy," Wilk explains. "It's an example of how Piscataway supports inclusive and innovative businesses."

#### **GOALS FOR THE FUTURE**

The future of Piscataway looks promising. "We aim to continue our economic development momentum," Mayor Wahler says. "With Standard & Poor's (S&P) Moody's rating us double A plus stable, we are well-positioned to attract new businesses and investments."



"Our proposed town center remains a top priority," Clarkin adds. "Spanning over 117 acres, this project will take at least five years to build, but it will be a significant addition to our community's amenities"

Piscataway's leadership is committed to ensuring that the Township remains a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous community. Mayor Wahler aptly states, "Piscataway is a place for everybody, and we are dedicated to ensuring it remains a thriving, inclusive community for generations to come."

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

#### ■ NAI DiLeo-Bram & Co.

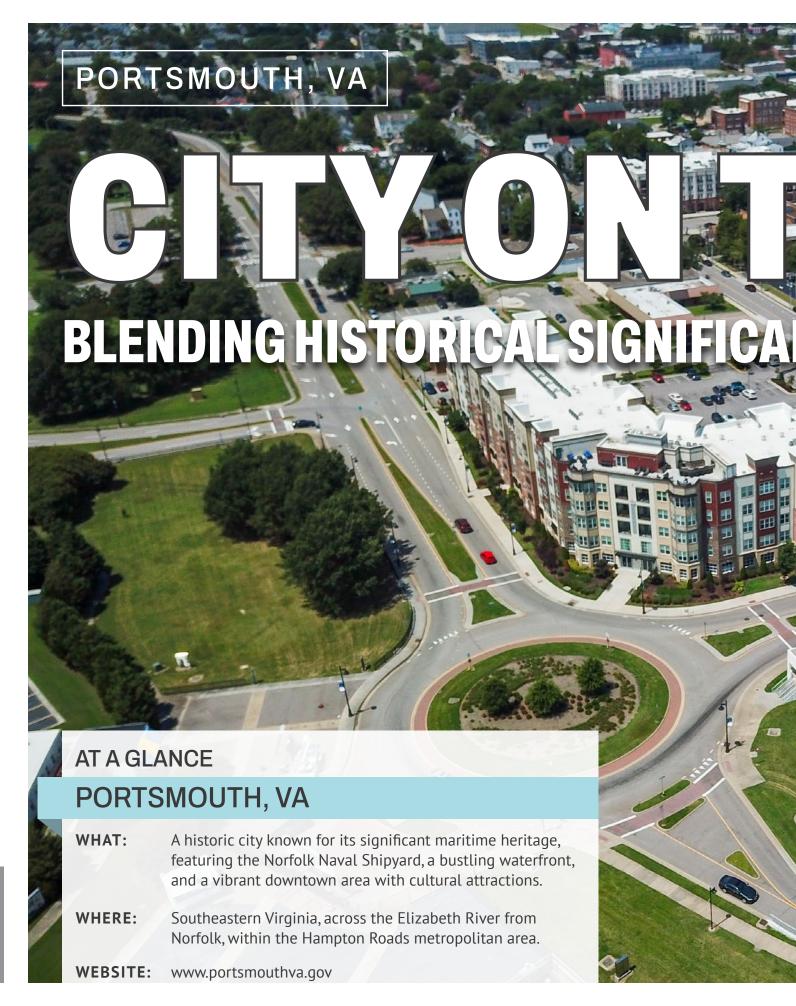
#### www.naidb.com

NAI DiLeo-Bram & Co. (NAIDB) offers a full suite of CRE services backed by over 85 years of experience throughout Middlesex, Morris, Essex, Union, Somerset, Mercer and Hunterdon counties. The firm's professional team offers the personalized service and knowledge of a local firm backed by the resources of a global company.

- Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey www.lsmnj.org
- **■** Timothy Christian School

www.timothychristian.org

Timothy Christian School is a K4-12 independent, co-educational, college preparatory school. For 75 years Timothy Christian has faithfully partnered with parents to provide the finest academic education with a biblical worldview, equipping students to lead courageously in the world today!





has been the opening of Rivers Casino. Since its inauguration over a year ago, the casino has become a major entertainment destination and economically impacted the city. Mayor Glover speaks enthusiastically about the casino's success: "The Rivers Casino Portsmouth has created an entertainment destination within our city and the region. It's not just about gaming but fine dining and diverse entertainment opportunities that attract visitors and residents alike."

The casino has generated significant revenue, enabling the city to fund local schools and provide residential tax relief for residents. "The financial benefits have been substantial," Glover notes. "We're now able to meet 100% of our schools' funding requests and offer tax relief to our citizens."

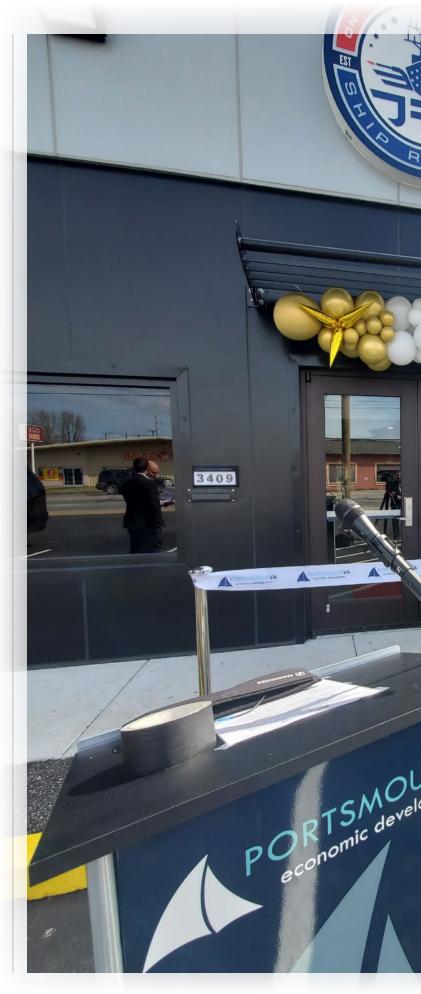
The casino has also created approximately 1,300 jobs, contributing positively to the local economy. Donahue elaborates, "The casino is on track with its employment targets, continuously working to maintain a full staff. The jobs created span various roles, from hospitality to security, providing diverse employment opportunities for our residents."

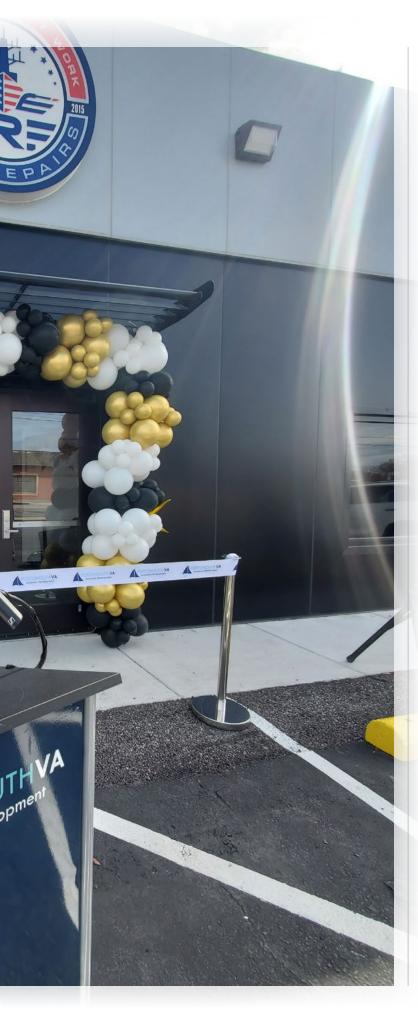
#### ADVANCEMENTS IN EDUCATION

Portsmouth's commitment to education and workforce development is evident in its innovative programs aimed at preparing students for successful careers and providing continuous learning opportunities for adults. Saleh highlights the city's efforts in this area: "We work closely with Portsmouth Public Schools' Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, organizing industry tours and events like 'Hire Our Grads', where students can secure jobs before they even graduate."

The initiatives have led to a significant increase in student employment after graduation. "We've seen a 70% increase in students being hired after graduation," Saleh reports. This success is largely due to the exposure and opportunities we provide throughout the school year."

The city also funds residents' training programs, expanding maritime, healthcare, IT, and trade opportunities. "Our training is fully funded, providing residents with certifications that lead to careers





in high-demand sectors," Saleh explains. The comprehensive approach ensures that students and adults have the skills to thrive in today's job market.

The partnership with TCC (Tidewater Community College) has been crucial to this initiative. "Starting July 1st, we will be offering expanded training opportunities in maritime, building and trades, healthcare, and IT," Saleh adds. "This allows residents to gain industry-relevant skills and certifications at no cost, making higher education and professional development accessible to all."

#### **INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Community housing development is a cornerstone of Portsmouth's growth strategy. One notable initiative is the Emerging Developers program, which aims to support minority and women developers. Mayor Glover explains, "The program will train and support developers to complete projects that meet community needs, like affordable housing."

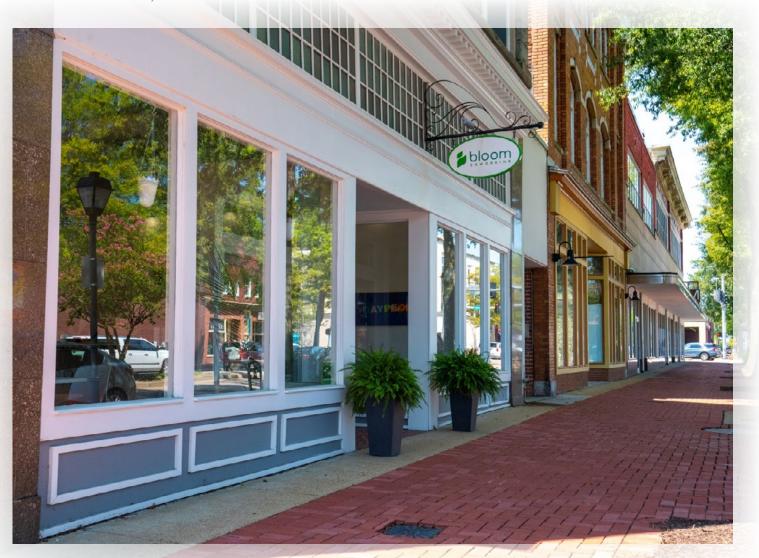
Donahue adds, "The program ensures that our development projects are inclusive, providing opportunities for minority and women-owned firms. It's about equity in economic development."

The city is also focusing on its Innovation District to expand downtown westward, foster small business development, and create new residential areas. "We're addressing the strong demand for affordable housing while promoting innovative business models," Donahue states.

The Innovation District is envisioned as a hub for technological advancement and entrepreneurial activity. "We want to create a space where small businesses and startups can thrive, fostering innovation and driving economic growth in the city," Donahue elaborates. The district will include coworking spaces, incubators, and accelerators to support emerging businesses.

#### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Improving the quality of life for Portsmouth residents is a top priority. Mayor Glover shared exciting plans for City Park, a central recreational area. "We're reimagining City Park to make it an even more familyfriendly destination. With upgraded playgrounds, a



miniature train called Pokey Smokey, and a nine-hole golf course, it's a gem in our city," he says.

Portsmouth also embraces its rich history, with groups like History Alive bringing the city's past to life through reenactments and educational tours. "Portsmouth was founded in 1752, and we cherish our historical heritage, which adds to the city's unique charm and attracts tourism," Glover notes.

Various community events and activities enhance the quality of life in Portsmouth. Donahue emphasizes, "We host numerous events almost daily, from concerts at the Atlantic Union Pavilion to farmers' and flea markets in the Olde Towne district. These activities create a vibrant community atmosphere and provide residents and visitors with many entertainment options."

City Park's redevelopment is part of a broader initiative to improve recreational facilities across Portsmouth. "We're also looking at enhancing other parks and public spaces, adding more green areas, playgrounds, and sports facilities," Glover says. "These projects aim to promote outdoor activities and provide residents with more opportunities to engage in healthy lifestyles."

#### **TOURISM INFLUX**

Portsmouth's tourism sector is flourishing, partly thanks to its scenic waterfront and numerous cultural events. The city is a hub of activity, offering a mix of historical attractions, recreational facilities, and entertainment venues. Donahue notes, "We have immediate access to some of the most beautiful waterways in the state, and our park facilities are top-notch. It's a great place to call home and a great place to visit."





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Under the leadership of Mr. Donald Mills, President & General Manager, Mills Marine & Ship Repair, LLC has grown to become a top tier service provider, offering dependable solutions tailored to meet the unique requirements of each client. Our team is equipped with the expertise and experience to handle a wide range of maritime repair and maintenance needs.

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Looking ahead, Portsmouth has ambitious plans for future development. The city is focusing on redeveloping its downtown waterfront, transforming city-owned land into mixed-use spaces with commercial, residential, and recreational uses. "We envision a new community along the Elizabeth River with restaurants, offices, housing, and even a new hotel," Donahue shares.

The redevelopment will also generate new revenue

by putting previously tax-exempt land back on the tax rolls, a crucial step for Portsmouth's economic growth. "The waterfront properties will host a variety of new uses, providing opportunities for small business development and new residential options," Donahue says.

The waterfront redevelopment project is designed to create a vibrant mixed-use community that integrates commercial, residential, and recreational spaces. "We



are looking to create a dynamic environment that attracts both businesses and residents, making our waterfront a focal point for growth and activity," Donahue explains.

#### **ECONOMIC EQUITY**

Another significant initiative is the Economic Uplift Program, an accelerator designed to help established businesses grow and reach new heights. "The program provides business owners with the

knowledge and resources needed to develop their strategies and operations," Donahue explains. "It's about helping businesses in emerging communities thrive and succeed."

The Economic Uplift Program, starting in late July, will specifically target businesses that have been operating for at least five years. "This eight-week program, in partnership with Bloom Coworking and AGH Advisory Services, will focus on helping these businesses scale up and achieve sustainable growth," Donahue details. "We're providing the tools and knowledge necessary for them to reach the next level."

#### **LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT**

Portsmouth's economic development efforts focus on supporting local businesses. The city offers a range of incentives and support programs to attract and retain businesses. "We have local incentive programs to assist with business development needs, from startup funding to expansion support," Donahue says.

Portsmouth's Economic Development Authority also provides grants for property improvements, helping businesses enhance their operations and attract more customers. "We assist with everything from facade improvements to interior build outs, ensuring that businesses have the support they need to succeed," Donahue explains.

The city's commitment to supporting businesses extends to providing concierge-level service, guiding businesses from initial contact with the city through their growth and expansion. "We aim to make the experience as smooth and positive as possible, serving as a one-stop shop for all business needs," Donahue proudly states.

#### **FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

Portsmouth's leadership team is united in their vision for the city's future, focusing on economic development, educational advancements, community projects, and quality of life improvements. The city is poised for continued growth, with ambitious plans that promise to transform Portsmouth into a thriving, inclusive, and vibrant community.

Mayor Glover summed up the city's outlook:





"Portsmouth is a city that cares about its people. We're committed to making Portsmouth the best place to live, work, play, and raise a family. We're just starting, and there's so much more to come."

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

#### ■ Mills Marine & Ship Repair, LLC www.millsmarineshiprepair.com

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## RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CA

# AHDDENGE SHIRSTER

GROWING QUICKLY, THIS CITY IS EMBRACING THE FUTURE WHILE KEEPING ITS ROOTS IN VIEW

AT A GLANCE

## RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CA

WHAT: A suburban city in San Bernardino County, California, experiencing

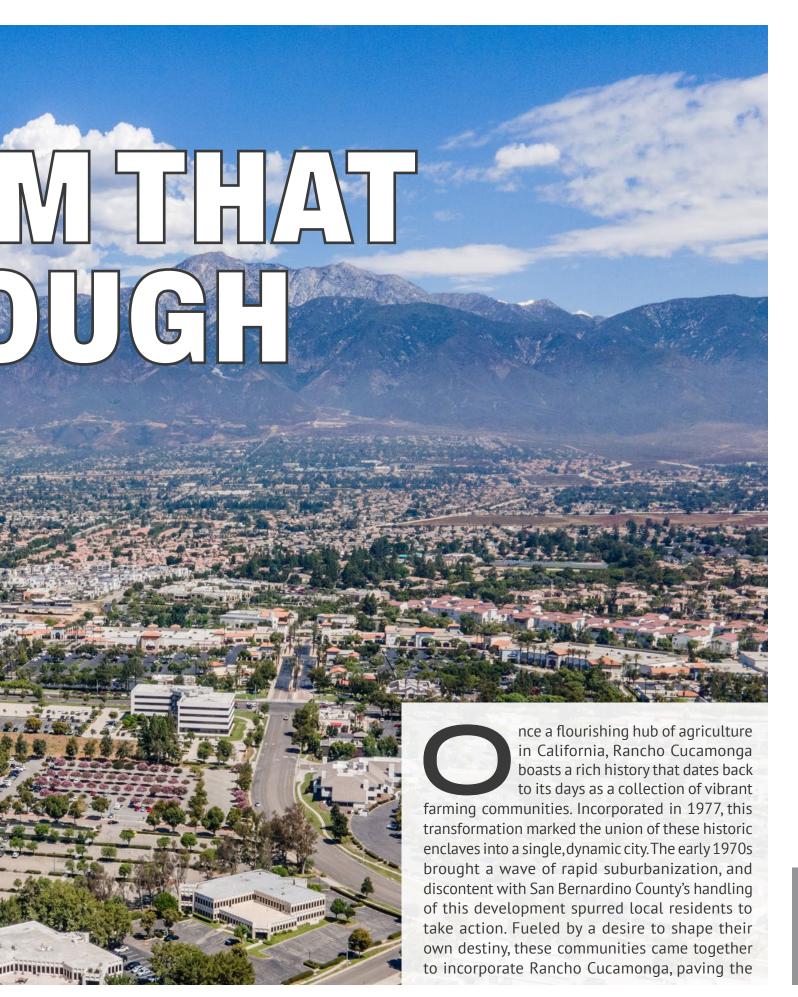
significant growth and development, particularly in its mix of residential neighborhoods, commercial developments, and

recreational amenities.

WHERE: Located at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in San

Bernardino County, California.

**VEBSITE:** www.citvofrc.us



way for a new era of self-determined growth and progress.

Julie Sowles, Deputy City Manager over Civic and Cultural Services, and Matt Burris, Deputy City Manager over Community and Economic Development, shared their insights on the City's journey and ambitions.

"Our origin story is rooted in wanting to control our growth and development," Burris explains. "Our founders envisioned a different type of community from what existed in the Inland Empire at the time." This vision has guided the City's policymakers, who are known for their bold ideas and patience in realizing long-term plans.

#### **MASTER PLANS**

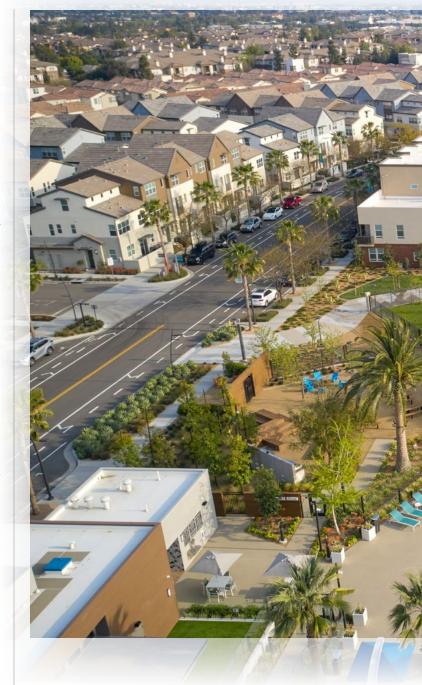
The City's commitment to planning and development is evident in its recent updates to the General Plan and various master plans. Adopted in December 2021, the updated General Plan sets the stage for future master plans, including those for the area around the minor league baseball stadium and civic center as well as the economic development strategy.

The economic development strategy, updated every five years, plays a crucial role in guiding the City's efforts. The latest strategy, influenced by community member insights gained during the General Plan update, focuses on changing development patterns to attract a more vibrant and diverse community. "We aim to create urban, active, and vibrant spaces that appeal to younger and diverse professionals, middle managers, and executives," Burris notes.

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Rancho Cucamonga's economic development strategy leverages its strengths in manufacturing, finance, insurance, real estate, and professional services. Recognizing Rancho Cucamonga's competitive advantages, the strategy aims to support and grow these industries.

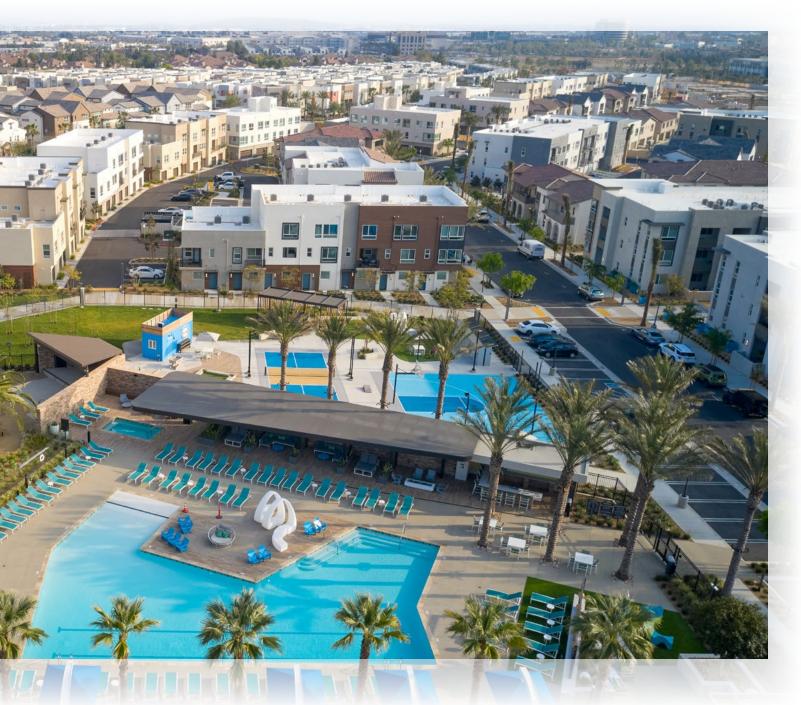
While the City's thriving logistics industry expanded during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the City also seeks to reduce the long commutes of its educated residents by attracting more local jobs in white-collar industries.



Burris highlights the importance of regional economic development partnerships and transportation investments. "We're looking at major transportation investments, including high-speed rail connecting Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas, which will enhance our regional economy and provide new amenities, transportation options, and housing."

#### TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

One of the most anticipated projects is the Brightline West high-speed passenger rail, which will connect Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas with stops in Hesperia and Apple Valley. This all-electric, zero-



emission train will travel at top speeds of 200 miles per hour, covering the 218-mile distance in record time.

Sowles emphasizes the positive impact of this project on the City's hospitality services, reducing emissions, and creating jobs. "The project will generate 35,000 jobs during construction and about 1,000 permanent operations and maintenance jobs once operational," she says.

This ambitious transportation project is poised to transform the region, creating a more interconnected Southern California. The anticipated influx of visitors and ease of travel will undoubtedly boost local businesses and tourism, making Rancho Cucamonga a central hub for economic activity.

#### ATTRACTING NEW BUSINESSES

Rancho Cucamonga has seen a surge in new and noteworthy businesses. Westland Group, a 240-person engineering and survey company, is relocating its headquarters to the City, indicating success in achieving a long-held goal of attracting professional service firms. Other significant additions include Smart & Final's parent company, Chedraui USA, opening a 1.4 million square foot facility, and





## UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN RANCHO CUCAMONGA

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#### PROVIDING THE 'RIGHT MIX'- JRC'S SHARED DEVELOPMENT VISION

With the continued need for housing and commercial new construction options in key states such as California coupled with the availability of beautiful landscapes ripe for development, possessing the vision and resources to provide the leading vision of how this land is to be used is left to only industry's best.

Representing a leader in recognizing value-added opportunities while working with key public partners, JRC is breaking commercial and residential ground while building far past the competition.

Working closely with the City of Rancho on both a shared vision and deep commitment to the community, JRC can bring the city's vision to life while offering the expertise that is needed down the construction path.

In business for over eight years, JRC has positioned itself as an industry leader and trusted city partner in the crucial area of developing land sites to lead to the construction of mixed-use projects. An entirely private-owned company with deep-seated community connections, JRC does not rely on outside investors to bring its bold designs and vision to fruition.

JRC has lept past the competition by utilizing its key strengths including the ability to pivot quickly, listen to the needs of the city, and understand the best use of lands that are available while keeping sustainability and aesthetics top of mind.

JRC has only two partners which has proved to provide a unique edge over other mixed-use investors and developers. While other companies may be slow to put plans into action, JRC can make decisions quickly and with streamlined- efficiency even through economically difficult times. As financing dried up for mixed-use projects in past years, JRC, which is entirely self-funded, was able to move forward and provide the financing for projects to move forward.

With the ambition to see where the best opportunities are and the ability to get the job done without any unnecessary slow-downs, JRC is a partner that is not only valued but key to future mixed-use developments.

JRC looks forward to future collaboration with the City of Rancho and will provide the 'right mix' to further develop and bring its shared vision to life in the years to come.



the expansion of Coca-Cola's current operations to include a bottling facility, the first in Southern California in decades.

The City has also welcomed popular brands like Shake Shack and Nike Well Collective, which are thriving in their new locations. "We see these businesses succeeding here as a testament to our Rancho Cucamonga's strong market, stable property values, and high-performing locations," Burris says.

This influx of new businesses is not only a sign

of the City's economic vitality but also a draw for more companies looking for a stable and prosperous environment. Rancho Cucamonga offers a unique blend of urban amenities and suburban charm, making it an attractive destination for both startups and established firms.

#### LIBRARY LEGACY

Sowles highlights the City's focus on expanding arts and culture. Victoria Gardens, a lifestyle center, houses the Victoria Gardens Cultural Center, including the Paul A. Biane Public Library and the Lewis Family



Playhouse. The Playhouse offerings have returned to pre-Pandemic levels and attracted diverse audiences.

The Paul A. Biane Public Library, a national awardwinning library, is developing the second floor of its facility. "The Randall Lewis Second Story and Beyond®," the next chapter in the library's legacy recently opened. The top-floor interactive discovery space is the first of its kind in the nation where a public library offers a dedicated area for "sneaky learning" with a STEM lab and art studio.

The space features about a dozen museum-quality exhibits where families can play interactively and learn together. The innovative space is expected to become a major attraction for the region, as there are no similar facilities nearby.

#### **CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL ENRICHMENT**

Rancho Cucamonga also invests in inclusive community services. A new playground at Beryl Park East caters to individuals of all abilities, and the adaptive sports program empowers people with physical disabilities. The City's new dog park, The



Bark at Central Park has also been wildly successful.

Public art initiatives, such as mini mural projects and utility box art programs, feature local artists and enhance the City's aesthetic appeal. "We aim to create spaces where people want to hang out after work and enjoy free entertainment," Sowles adds.

#### STRATEGIC VISION

The strategic vision for Rancho Cucamonga focuses on creating a balanced and sustainable urban environment. This includes fostering mixed-use developments that blend residential, commercial,

and recreational spaces. The City aims to reduce reliance on cars, encourage public transit use, and create walkable neighborhoods by promoting high-density, mixed-use developments along key corridors, all while preserving the character of its existing neighborhoods.

"Our strategic vision is to create a city that is not just a place to live but a place to thrive," Burris says. "We want to build communities where people can live, work, and play without having to travel long distances."

Sustainability is at the heart of Rancho Cucamonga's



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In today's digital age, reliable and high-speed internet is not a luxury but a necessity for businesses. Onward understands this imperative and stands out by offering custom-fit solutions tailored to the unique needs of each business. From startups to established corporations, our focus is on delivering exceptional connectivity solutions that drive productivity and growth.

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Experience Onward—where exceptional service meets innovative solutions. Let us help you transform your internet experience and propel your business forward. With Onward, the future of your business connectivity is bright.



growth plans. The City is committed to reducing its carbon footprint, enhancing green spaces, and promoting environmentally friendly practices. This includes expanding public transit options, encouraging the use of electric vehicles, and developing green infrastructure.

"We're investing in projects that will make Rancho Cucamonga a leader in sustainability," Sowles states. "From our high-speed passenger rail project to our green building initiatives, we're committed to creating a sustainable future for our residents."

#### **ECONOMIC DIVERSITY**

By attracting a wide range of businesses, from hightech firms to artisanal shops, Rancho Cucamonga ensures a resilient economy that can weather economic fluctuations. The City's efforts to attract professional services and high-end retail have already paid off, as evidenced by new businesses coming to the city including Philz Coffee, FiveStar Gourmet Foods, Seasons 52 and Sanctity Hotel





Rancho Cucamonga Tapestry Collection by Hilton.

"We're not just looking for big corporations; we're also supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs," Burris says.

Engaging with the community is important to the success of Rancho Cucamonga's plans. The City regularly solicits feedback from residents through public meetings, surveys, and social media. This input helps shape policies and projects, ensuring they meet the community's needs and expectations.

"We believe in a collaborative approach to city planning," Sowles notes. "Our residents are our partners in building the future of Rancho Cucamonga. Their input and participation are crucial to our success."

#### **DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY**

In today's digital age, connectivity encompasses access to information and technology. Rancho Cucamonga is investing in fiber-optic infrastructure to provide residents with high-speed broadband internet services. The initiative includes expanding free public Wi-Fi in parks and public spaces and offering digital literacy programs.

"We're committed to bridging the digital divide and ensuring all residents can participate in the digital economy," Sowles explains. "Our goal is to make Rancho Cucamonga a digitally connected community."

#### HIDDEN GEM OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Rancho Cucamonga's story is one of transformation, resilience, and strategic growth. From its agricultural roots to its modern-day status as a thriving urban center, the City's journey is a testament to the power of visionary planning and community-driven development. As it continues to evolve, Rancho Cucamonga stands to achieve even greater heights, offering a high quality of life and abundant opportunities for all who call it home.

"We hear over and over again that people are surprised by what Rancho Cucamonga has to offer," Burris says. "The objective is to transition from a hidden gem to a well-known jewel."





#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

#### ■ JRC | Real Estate Investments www.jrcrealestateinvestments.com

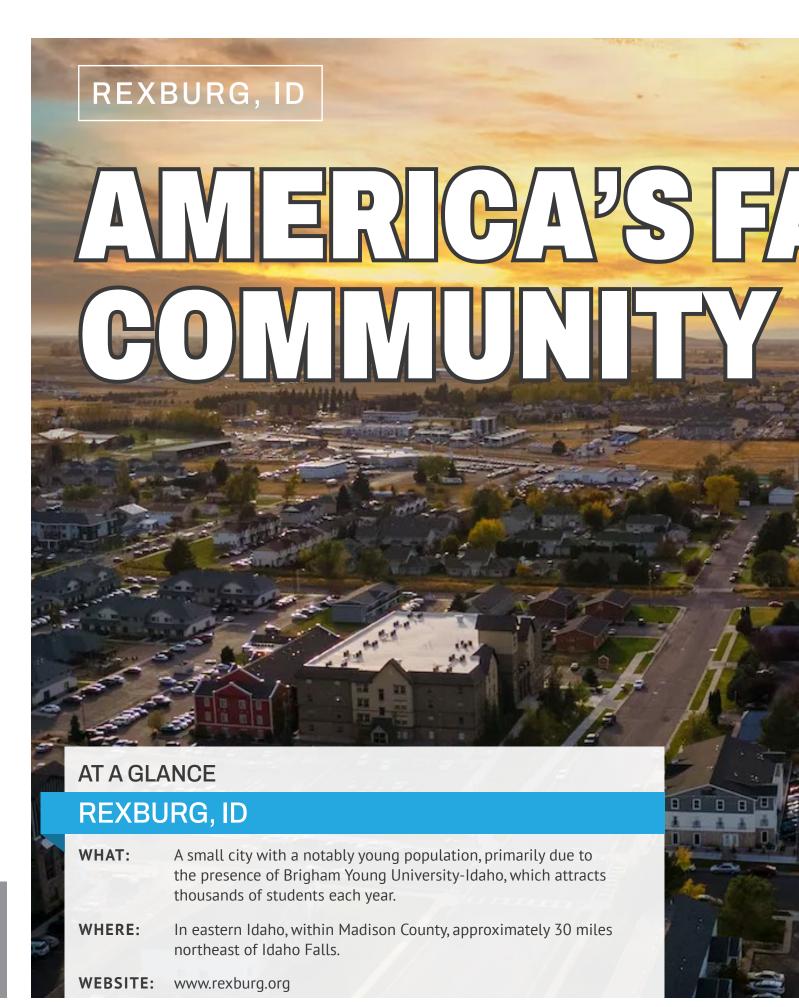
#### ■ Onward

#### www.getonward.com

Onward is a nationally recognized internet service provider and broadband network operator that specializes in fiber internet. Onward manages several public/private partnerships and the Digital 395 network. Onward also serves Vandenberg AFB, Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Mountain Warfare Training Center US Marine Corps Base, Nellis AFB and Edwards AFB.

#### ■ Residence Inn by Marriott Ontario Rancho Cucamonga www.marriott.com/ontcu

Offering contemporary amenities, comfortable suites, and a perfect location near Rancho Cucamonga's businesses and attractions, Residence Inn Ontario Rancho Cucamonga allows quests to thrive on longer stays. The hotel is operated by DKN Hotels, a full-service hotel management company, and was developed by real estate and development company DKN Ventures.





Sitting down with the city's leadership—including Mayor Jerry Merrill; Scott Johnson, Director of Economic Development and Public Relations; Keith Davidson, Public Works Director; and Aaron Denney, Economic Development Assistant—provide a comprehensive picture of Rexburg's current state and future aspirations.

#### A CITY OF YOUTH AND FAMILY

Rexburg's youthful demographic sets it apart from many other cities. Mayor Merrill, who has seen the city's growth firsthand, describes the city's charm: "Our tagline, 'America's Family Community,' reflects our commitment to creating an environment where families can thrive. With the youngest average age in the country—around 22 to 23 years—we're a vibrant, youthful city surrounded by stunning natural features. The mountains, Yellowstone Park, and Jackson Hole provide endless opportunities for outdoor activities, and we're dedicated to ensuring that Rexburg is a great place for families."

The city's proximity to natural attractions and its focus on family-oriented development create a unique living experience. The focus is evident in the city's housing strategies and commitment to providing a balanced mix of single-family and multifamily housing options.

#### HOUSING MARKET AND DEVELOPMENT

Rexburg is experiencing a significant shift in its housing market. According to Johnson, the city is making strides to balance the demand for single- and multi-family housing. "We have a sufficient supply of multi-family units, but we are still working to address the need for more single-family homes. We've struggled to keep up with demand, but we're trying to streamline regulations and facilitate new developments."

Davidson highlights: "We have several new projects in the pipeline, including affordable housing units and market-rate developments. Notable projects include the Summer Field and Alpine subdivisions and the Madison Park complex, adding around 300 units. Additionally, we are working on a new student housing complex to accommodate the university's planned expansion."





Brigham Young University-Idaho's growth plays a significant role in shaping the city's housing market. The university plans to increase its enrollment by 6,000 students, further driving demand for student housing and impacting the local real estate landscape. Mayor Merrill elaborates on the university's unique approach: "The university operates on a trimester system, which means they serve about 40,000 students annually. This system allows them to offer affordable education while managing a high student turnover, which adds to the dynamic nature of our community."

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE IMPACT**

Infrastructure improvements are a central focus for Rexburg, especially with ongoing road construction projects to enhance traffic flow and safety. Mayor Merrill describes the current state of roadwork as follows: "This summer has been challenging with major road construction. We're updating two main interchanges on Highway 20, which have caused significant traffic disruptions. The work is essential to improve traffic flow and safety, and while it's inconvenient now, it will greatly benefit the city once completed."

"The current road improvements include implementing a divergent diamond interchange design. This innovative design will help manage traffic more efficiently by reducing conflict points and streamlining the movement of vehicles", Davidson notes. The project is expected to be completed by the fall semester, which should ease the traffic congestion caused by the university's student influx.

#### FIBER INTERNET AND TECHNOLOGICAL **ADVANCEMENTS**

Fiber internet is set to transform Rexburg into a modern, connected community. By mid-2025, the city plans to have high-speed fiber internet available to every home, with multiple providers offering competitive services. Johnson highlights the impact of this project, "We anticipated about a 40% take rate initially, but we're seeing about a 70% take rate. The high demand reflects the city's need for robust internet services, especially as more people move here to work remotely."



### **COVERING ALL THE BASES**

# CONNECTED HEALTH FOR DOCTOR AND PATIENT PEACE OF MIND

A trip to the doctor can be an anxiety-inducing experience for many. If a patient has been given a specific diagnosis that requires a prescription medication to manage, the worry can be compounded. Patients may have many questions concerning the accessibility to a particular medication, and there may be many questions that arise concerning associated insurance coverage to help with any additional costs a patient may bear. It can be a web of confusion for many when it comes to navigating the prescription drug market.

To help simplify the process and take some of the ambiguity out of the equation, Legrande Health, a provider of healthcare prescription services for both patients and doctors by helping to guide them through the often complicated prescription drug process, has filled a vital role within the medical sector.

Established in 2016 and based in Rexburg, ID, the founders of Legrande Health recognized a need in the medical market to serve as a top-tier guide for patients and doctors to help navigate prescription drug coverage while acting as a valuable resource for any information that is not readily available. A one-stop shop for all the necessary information to make informed decisions, keep costs low and provide solutions for navigating through the medical maze.

Transparency is at the heart of Legrande's business model whether it comes to the cost of prescriptions, the ease of delivery, and key information about insurance coverage. Legrande's platform offers both the patient and the medical professionals straightforward and individualized guidance as well as providing open lines of communication to facilitate all of the patients' and doctors' specific needs.

Doctors will be able to provide a superior level of care by being able to recommend better product options with competitive prices based on the facilitative role Legrande plays in the prescription drug process. Patients can make more informed decisions and not be left with fear regarding what degree of insurance will be available to cover prescription drug costs.

Working diligently to find the best prices and offer tailored advice, Legrande Health will help to maximize manufacturing discounts, associated insurance coverage, as well as a low cash pay price.

Simply put, Legrande Health eases the healthcare experience for both the doctor who can be confident in the medications they prescribe, and for patients who will not be preoccupied with health questions and insurance coverage worries.

Patients and physicians are not the only ones benefiting from Legrande's progressive and unmatched health-related platform, so too are manufacturers and pharmacies. Legrande Health facilitates manufacturers by providing a streamlined and cost-effective method of delivering their products to patients who require them as prescribed by their doctor. Legrande's platform also offers pharmacies a knowledgeable and loyal partner which can in turn increase their competitive advantage and ultimately leaves the door open for further business growth.

These key services that Legrande Health has perfected are carried out by leveraging leading technology, and key programs, and by consolidating relevant data which is combined with patients' insurance coverage. Legrande Health goes the extra mile and helps to facilitate the work that pharmacies do by matching patients with partner pharmacies that best suit their medical needs.

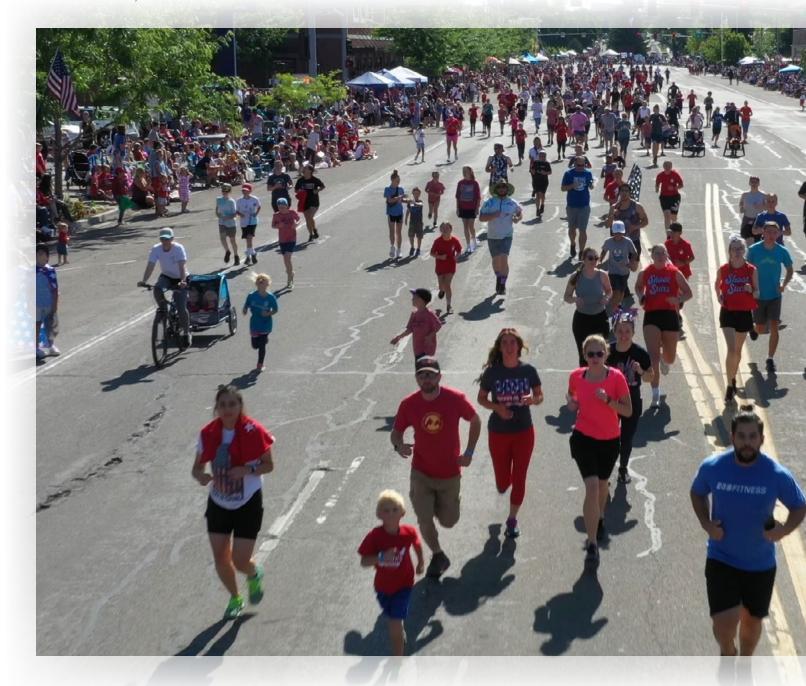
What does this mean for all levels of the medical pyramid- reassured patients who are paying the best prices for their prescriptions, confident physicians who can carry out continued expert care attributed in part to the knowledge and services provided by Legrande Health as well as a streamlined manufacturing process and a productive pharmacy model.

Legrande offers loyal and connected care with the dedication of a team of skilled professionals at the helm, all of whom are focused on easing and facilitating the healthcare process for all those involved.

In a technology and data-driven world, Legrande Health has been able to build a platform that keeps everyone informed, helps to lower prescription healthcare costs, and has provided a springboard for continued pharmacy, manufacturing, and medical success for its valued health-related partners.

By offering personalized service and a simpler path, Legrande Health has taken a giant and much-needed step toward the future of cooperative-based healthcare solutions.

Visit WWW.LEGRANDEHEALTH.COM for more information.



The open-access network allows homeowners to choose from multiple providers without contracts or data caps. Johnson shares his experience, "I pay \$68 for a one-gig connection up and down, and I can switch providers anytime if I'm not satisfied." The flexibility and affordability make Rexburg an attractive destination for tech-savvy residents and businesses.

#### **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND GROWTH**

Rexburg's growth is not limited to housing and infrastructure; the city also fosters a burgeoning business environment. Johnson emphasizes the city's economic potential, "Rexburg offers significant

opportunities for business development, thanks to our growing population and favorable living conditions. Our city's safety, cleanliness, and strong community spirit make it an attractive location for businesses."

The city's economic landscape includes major employers and recent business expansions. Johnson highlights the growth in key sectors, "Education, healthcare, and agriculture are major industries here. Notably, Basic American Foods recently completed a \$125 million expansion of their plant, which was a competitive process involving multiple locations. Additionally, tech manufacturing is emerging as



a significant sector, with companies like AMET providing automated welding systems for highprofile clients like NASA and Boeing."

Denny speaks about the city's focus on entrepreneurship, "We recently received a \$6.5 million grant from the Economic Development Administration to build an entrepreneurial center. This facility will provide low-cost rental space and mentoring for startups, fostering local business growth and innovation."

#### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The city's Chamber of Commerce plays an important

role in fostering business relations, and the collaboration with local schools and county officials contributes to the city's overall growth. The school district consistently achieves a 97-98% graduation rate, and the strong relationship between the city, university, and local organizations supports the community's development.

Its exceptional school system highlights the district's success, which is vital to the community. The high graduation rate is a testament to educators' dedication and families' support.

#### **CULTURAL EVENTS**

Rexburg's community spirit is further showcased through its cultural and recreational events. The city hosts numerous events that attract residents and visitors alike. "We have a rich cultural arts program with student orchestras, choirs, and performances featuring top-tier artists," Mayor Merrill says. Events like the monthly First Friday art walk, the Teton Dam marathon, and the historic carousel draw thousands of visitors annually.

The city's emphasis on cultural activities extends to various community events. Mayor Merrill shares, "In August, we host Celebrate Youth, an event sponsored by the school district that attracts 12,000 to 14,000 people to one of our largest parks. It's a massive event with activities for all ages, and it's a great way for families to come together."

The city's commitment to family-friendly events continues throughout the year. Experience Rexburg in September features businesses setting up booths in the park to introduce themselves to college students. Oktoberfest celebrates the mighty potato in October with square dancing, face painting, and various potato dishes.

Rexburg's winter activities also stand out. The city transforms its golf course into a winter park, offering cross-country skiing, sledding, and ice skating. People are encouraged to enjoy winter with activities that benefit their physical and mental health. The city is also excited about the upcoming hockey arena, a public-private partnership expected to be completed around the holidays.



#### INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Rexburg's appeal extends to potential investors and developers. The city offers various opportunities for growth and expansion, driven by its strategic initiatives and supportive community environment. Johnson highlights the city's proactive approach to development, "We are working on a downtown redevelopment project, which includes mixeduse parking structures, retail spaces, offices, and housing. This \$70-75 million project is set to start in the second quarter of next year and will create significant opportunities for businesses to locate in Rexburg."

The downtown redevelopment is part of a broader effort to enhance the city's infrastructure and attract new businesses. Davidson provides insights into the upcoming projects, "We are also working on



upgrading our sewer and water systems, and we have plans to relocate our airport to handle larger business jets. These projects support the city's growth and ensure we have the necessary infrastructure."

#### A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

Rexburg's safety is a key attraction. "We are continually voted among the safest cities in Idaho and the country," Mayor Merrill states. The city's low crime rate and family-friendly environment make it an ideal place to live and work. This reputation is bolstered by the strong community and local law enforcement relationship, fostering residents' sense of security and trust.

#### **LOOKING AHEAD**

As Rexburg continues to grow and evolve, its leadership remains focused on enhancing the city's infrastructure, housing, and economic opportunities. The city's commitment to family values, safety, and community development positions it as a vibrant and promising place for residents and businesses.

"Our job is to create a great place so that people want to be here, which in turn helps businesses attract the talent they need to be successful." With such a clear and compelling vision, Rexburg is indeed on the rise, ready to embrace a future filled with promise and potential.

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

**■** Legrande Health www.legrandehealth.com RUSSELL, ON



AT A GLANCE

### THE TOWNSHIP OF RUSSELL, ON

WHAT: A vibrant and forward-thinking community, experiencing growth

WHERE: Prescott and Russell County, ON

WEBSITE: www.russell.ca



Over the past decade, Russell Township has seen significant population growth, expanding from under 14,000 to approximately 22,000 residents. This growth is supported by a thriving economy, with 300 to 400 new building permits issued annually. "We have a very nice, small-town feel here, but with a lot of recreational amenities," depicts CAO, Richard Godin. With this in mind, the township maintains a balance between preserving its rural charm, and seeking out quality of life opportunities, making it an attractive place to call home.

# HISTORIC DOWNTOWN AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Currently, investments are being made to revitalize the Main Streets in the villages of Embrun and Russell, while carefully preserving the unique aspects of each one. Jonathan Bourgon, Executive Director of Infrastructure Services, details, "It varies from what type of benches we will purchase, to sidewalks and making sure that we've maintained the right vibe. In Russell, it's more of a brick style, so we want to maintain that historical aspect."

At the same time, the township is working to ensure that downtown streetscape initiatives align with investments outlined in the transportation master plan. Small businesses are also supported through a community improvement plan, which provides funding for downtown entities to do façade improvements to their buildings.

#### COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

Godin highlights the vibrant business communities in both Embrun and Russell, noting the strong support from local entrepreneurs and the Chamber of Commerce. "We do value our local businesses. That is another close-knit community, where they work together and we work with them on a lot of projects as well," he portrays. "That's important when it comes to maintaining the character of our growing township."

Recent developments include a commercial park in Embrun, which is currently home to a vehicle dealership, with more establishments expected shortly including a grocery store. An industrial park along Highway 417 has also gained momentum







over the past decade, with ongoing efforts to attract more businesses. Long term, the hope is to bring in commercial and retail businesses that would benefit from the proximity to the highway although Godin admits that bringing the essential infrastructure does pose some financial challenges.

"We did evaluate the potential of bringing water and sewer services. It's very difficult to be doing it on our own," he asserts. "So, with help from the province or federal, that's one of the other projects that we're looking at."

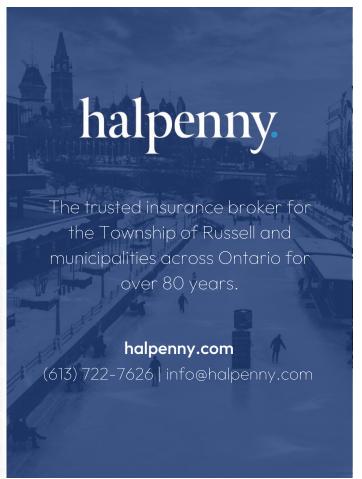
#### INVESTING IN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure development is pivotal to Russell Township's growth strategy, and Bourgon conveys that the forward-thinking investments of a decade ago are the reason for the rapid growth the municipality



can support today.

"We did invest a lot in our water system, and sanitary sewers as well, which created a lot of capacity to allow for that growth," he expands. "Now we're 10 years down the line, and the next big thing, in our next term, will be to maintain that capacity to allow for future growth." Efforts will also be put towards wastewater treatment improvements, ensuring



the municipality is up to or exceeding provincial standards.

Additionally, Russell Township faces the significant task of rebuilding its aging sewer system, once again taking a proactive approach to this investment. "We're using a climate change aspect, in that we need to oversize everything," Bourgon explains, noting that recent weather events are bringing more significant rainfall than those of the past.

"We need to account for that capacity, and we need to allow for that extra water coming down on our street, to convey that to our proper treatment facilities," he acknowledges. "So, we are at the point that we'll need to make major investments. As part of every road reconstruction, we need to accommodate for that storm sewer rebuild as well."

As for broadband infrastructure, the municipality is working to facilitate the federal initiative to bring fiber throughout the region within three years. "It's not necessarily an investment from the municipality, but we need to work with those utilities to facilitate the installation," relays Bourgon. "There's a lot of plans to review, and we need to issue some approvals for Bell, Rogers, and all the other utilities in our region. We are working closely with them to make sure that the project can happen in that timeframe."

## PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Russell Township is committed to enhancing the quality of life for residents, offering an impressive array of outdoor amenities and recreational facilities. Celine Guitard, Director of Parks and Recreation boasts, "Like the rest of the departments, Parks and Recreation has exploded in the last years."

Currently, the community offers 24 parks, including a modern sports dome with a soccer turf, tennis, pickleball, and fitness amenities, as well as a walking track. Recently, an accessible park was added to the township's repertoire, adding tennis and basketball courts, and exercise components for seniors. 10 km of natural walking trails offer a scenic tour and





connection between the villages of Embrun and Russell.

Construction has started on a new recreation complex featuring three ice rinks, a six-lane pool, and a 10,000-square-foot community hall. "That is a major project, the biggest that the Township of Russell has ever had. We are all excited about this." Guitard asserts.

Godin says this new complex also has the potential to draw further development to the municipality.



He shares, "I could see that as being a big attraction factor. Right now, we don't have any hotels in the township, but that may be something that will drive that need and that want, especially if we're able to host hockey tournaments and other sports events."

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES**

Sustainability is a key priority for the township. "The word is in our vision, and it's all over our strategic plan. Anytime we're making new constructions, we're looking at having those green technologies," Godin reports. "We have invested in certain energy efficient projects, lighting retrofits in all of our buildings, and the hydro savings that we get from that, we're putting into a reserve to be able to reinvest into those green initiatives."

These include further energy-efficient building upgrades, the inclusion of hybrid and electric vehicles in the municipal fleet and plans for more electric vehicle charging stations on township properties. Bourgon remarks, "We are working on a Climate Action Plan to see if there are other ways that we can be more sustainable by reducing our

entire carbon footprint. We're hoping to have that completed by the end of this year."

#### LOOKING AHEAD

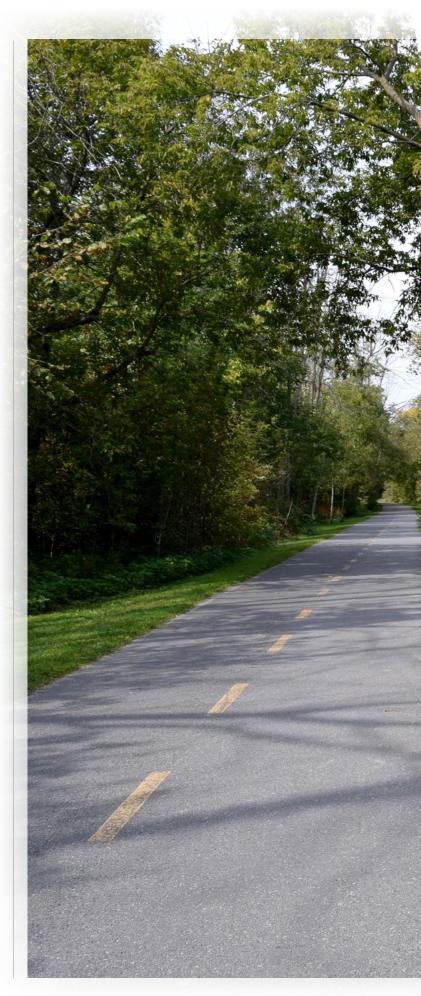
Moving forward, the Township of Russell continues to embrace growth and transformation fueled by a proactive approach to planning and community development. "We are trying to organize ourselves as far as what our next 5 to 10 years look like. We're working on all our different master plans now because the official plan is being adopted," illustrates Godin, underscoring the need for continued affordable housing solutions in the municipality.

For Bourgon, the focus is on supporting growth.

"We're looking at older parts of our villages to do that densification, but the infrastructure cannot accommodate that growth. So that will be part of our future need," he states. "The infrastructure goal for the next 10 to 20 years it's to overlap all our plans together to create that financial need roadmap to make sure we maximize every penny that we have going forward."

In the realm of parks and recreation, Guitard emphasizes the dedication to maintaining and enhancing services for all residents. She elaborates, "We've been working diligently in the last years to create more daycare spaces, which are in very high demand. You can just imagine if you have 500 new houses coming in, most of these houses are being bought by young families." Alongside this, Guitard points to the new recreation complex as an exciting addition to the current amenities.

Looking to the future, the Township of Russell is a community committed to preserving its rural charm, while embracing modern growth. This balance of heritage and progress makes it a desirable place to live, work, and play, promising a vibrant future for all of its residents.





#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

#### ■ Halpenny Insurance Brokers Ltd.

#### www.halpenny.com

Halpenny Insurance Brokers has been the trusted insurance broker and partner of choice for municipalities in Eastern Ontario for over 80 years! Over 25 municipalities currently rely on Halpenny for their risk management solutions and extensive insurance advice. Our specialities include property, cyber, automobile, liability, employee benefits programs and group retirement services.

#### ■ Jp2g Consultants Inc.

#### www.jp2q.com

Jp2g is an employee owned, multidiscipline consulting firm providing engineering, planning, environmental, and project management services. We work with the public and private sectors, providing personalized client service while enhancing the communities we live in. With more than 50 years of consulting experience throughout Eastern Ontario, Jp2g is a trusted partner in community building.





**TOURISTS WITH ITS** 

**MANY CHARMS** 

may be small, but it is exceptionally lively. The community blends historic charm with forwardthinking initiatives, setting it apart. To uncover what makes Vermilion unique, we engage with key leaders driving the town's development: Mary Lee Prior, Manager of Economic Development; Mike Van Der Torre, Interim CAO; and Kevin Martin, Deputy Mayor.

Martin highlights Vermilion's charm and appeal: "We're a nice small community along Highway 16 and 41, between oil country and agriculture. With a population of 4,000, we offer a clean, unique downtown and are one of the few towns with a provincial park touching our borders. Lakeland College, an integral part of our town, brings in 1,400 students annually, adding diversity and vibrancy to our community."

Outdoor amenities are a significant draw for both residents and visitors. Martin elaborates, "We have extensive trails throughout our provincial park and town, an airport that draws people from all over, two rinks, and a curling rink. Our agricultural society hosts a three-day fair that attracts over 30,000 people."

#### REVITALIZING THE DOWNTOWN CORE

The heartbeat of Vermilion lies in its downtown area, where entrepreneurial spirit thrives. Martin explains, "Our downtown is home to great entrepreneurs and business owners who have restored many historic buildings, keeping our downtown core strong and unique. We have a retail development incentive program that supports new businesses, offering financial assistance for leasehold improvements, which has been immensely successful in filling retail gaps."

Prior elaborates on this initiative, "Even though we're a small community, we act like a little city. Our retail development incentive program, which has been running for about eight years, has resulted in over 40 new business licenses in the last three to five years. We identify retail gaps and offer up to \$15,000 for leasehold improvements, significantly supporting new businesses."

The downtown area is not just about commercial activities; it is Vermilion's cultural and social hub. The town hosts several annual events that unite the community and attract visitors. For instance, the "Taste of Vermilion" is a popular event that showcases local cuisine and culinary talent. "Our events are designed to highlight the best of Vermilion and to provide residents and visitors with memorable experiences," says Prior.



# INDUSTRIAL GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Vermilion's commitment to economic growth extends to industrial development. Prior explains, "We have an industrial development incentive program offering up to \$20,000 for leasehold improvements. Our proactive councils have developed two industrial parks, and in the last four months, we've sold over 50% of our fully developed land. We're attracting



businesses from neighboring areas and beyond, focusing on manufacturing and tech industries. Highspeed broadband has been a game-changer, making us one of the only rural communities in Alberta with fiber-optic connectivity."

Van Der Torre adds, "Our infrastructure projects include upgrading our sewer trunk main to support residential expansion adjacent to our provincial park. While securing funding is challenging, we're committed to growing our community through strategic investments."

The introduction of high-speed broadband is particularly noteworthy. "In today's digital age, having reliable and fast internet is crucial for businesses and residents. It enhances our attractiveness as a location for tech companies and remote workers," says Van Der Torre.

#### PARKS, RECREATION, AND TOURISM

Vermilion's natural beauty and recreational amenities are central to its appeal. Van Der Torre highlights, "Our provincial park, with over 40 kilometers of trails, attracts visitors from all over Canada. The park hosts soccer fields and ball diamonds and is part of our extensive town trail system. Our two hockey rinks and curling rink are significant community hubs, and we've even hosted provincial pickleball tournaments."

The town's commitment to tourism is evident in its collaboration with local businesses and Travel Alberta. Martin notes, "Our downtown businesses partner with the parks for bike and canoe rentals, creating a cohesive visitor experience. We're officially working to package these offerings through Travel Alberta to promote overnight stays and boost local spending."

Prior expands on the tourism strategy, "We work closely with Travel Alberta to highlight Vermilion as a destination. Our goal is to encourage overnight stays, significantly benefiting the local economy. Through initiatives like the Good Life Institute, we host events that attract visitors from far and wide. showcasing everything Vermilion offers."

#### HOUSING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing housing needs is crucial for Vermilion's growth. Prior states, "We're conducting a housing gap analysis to identify and address our housing needs. We have plans for mixed-use residential development and seek developers to invest in Vermilion. Our North Brennan area has 65 acres ready for 400 new houses."

The partnership with Lakeland College plays a vital role in workforce development. The college brings in 800 to 1,500 students annually, many of whom stay and work locally. These students take up rental units, and their trades, agriculture, and firefighting programs are crucial for the local workforce. The college's zero vacancy rate for rental units underscores the need for more housing.

Additionally, regular meetings are held with





Lakeland College to discuss mutual support and growth. The college is a key part of the community, and collaborative efforts are made to implement initiatives that benefit the students and the town.

#### **FUTURE OUTLOOK AND CHALLENGES**

Looking ahead, Vermilion's leadership is focused on strategic growth and overcoming funding challenges. Martin emphasizes, "Our top priority is the sewer trunk line to support residential and industrial expansion. We also want to strengthen our airport, a vital economic driver."

Mary Lee Prior adds, "We're seeking grant funding for trunk lines and developers for housing projects. We also leverage our relationship with Lakeland College and our proactive council to drive growth."

The airport is another key area of focus. "Our airport is a significant asset, and we're looking at ways to enhance its role in our economic development. We've been working with our airport committee to explore opportunities for growth and expansion," says Martin.

#### **COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES**

Vermilion is not just about economic growth; it's also about fostering a strong sense of community and cultural engagement. The town hosts various cultural events and festivals annually, contributing to a vibrant community life. "Our cultural initiatives are designed to celebrate our heritage and unite people," says Martin. Events like the Vermilion Heritage Festival and the annual agricultural fair exemplify how the town promotes cultural engagement.

The town also places a strong emphasis on inclusivity and community support. "We have various programs and initiatives to support different segments of our community, from youth programs to senior services. Our goal is to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and supported," says Prior.

#### **EDUCATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

Education and youth engagement are critical components of Vermilion's community strategy. The town works closely with local schools and educational institutions to provide high-quality education and opportunities for young people,



THE TOWN OF Vermilion places a high priority on economic development. The town boasts the best of both worlds — big-city amenities with small-town friendliness and security.

Strategically located along the picturesque Vermilion River at the main intersection of Yellowhead Highway 16 and Buffalo Trail Highway 41, Vermilion is a hub within the Alberta Eastern Trade Corridor. Two hours east of Edmonton and the Edmonton International Airport, and only 30 minutes from the City of Lloydminster, Vermilion is recognized as a strong and effective service centre.

Our residents say that the quality of life in Vermilion is second to none, thanks to great amenities and services, growth and development, established businesses, a good variety of new businesses, lots of parks and green spaces, various activities, a good economy, good healthcare and a very family-oriented community. Home to Lakeland College, the town's local economy is based primarily on agriculture with subsectors of oil and gas, education and tourism. In 2022 the Town of Vermilion installed high speed fibre throughout the community providing 1 Gig scalable to 10 Gig symmetrical broadband service – making Vermilion host to the highest internet speed in rural Alberta.

So whether you want to move to start a business, work virtually from Vermilion or move to raise a family — Vermilion is a modern great place to find or build your dream home. Join us in Vermilion!



believing that investing in education is investing in the future. Excellent schools and programs are in place to prepare the youth for success.

The town also supports various youth programs and initiatives, focusing on youth engagement. Numerous programs, from sports to arts and culture, are offered to keep young people active and involved in the community. The town's youth council also provides a

platform for young residents to voice their opinions and contribute to community decisions.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Vermilion is committed to environmental sustainability and has implemented various initiatives to protect and preserve its natural environment. "We recognize the importance of sustainability and are taking steps to reduce our environmental footprint.



From recycling programs to green energy initiatives, we are dedicated to making Vermilion a sustainable community," says Prior.

The town has introduced several green initiatives, including energy-efficient lighting, community gardens, and a robust recycling program. "Our goal is to create a sustainable community that not only meets the needs of today but also preserves resources for future generations," adds Martin.

#### **COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HEALTH**

Ensuring the safety and health of residents is a top priority for Vermilion. The town has a comprehensive

approach to community safety, including wellequipped emergency services and proactive health initiatives. "We have a strong focus on community safety. Our emergency services are top-notch and have various programs to promote health and wellness," says Van Der Torre.

The town's health initiatives include regular health fairs, wellness programs, and partnerships with local healthcare providers. "We want to ensure our residents access the best healthcare and wellness resources. Our programs are designed to support a healthy and active community," says Martin.

#### **ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION**



Vermilion, Alberta, exemplifies a community that balances historic charm with modern development. Through strategic initiatives, strong leadership, and a collaborative spirit, Vermilion is poised for continued growth and prosperity.

As the town moves forward, it remains a beacon of development and community spirit, showcasing what small-town Alberta offers. With its focus on economic growth, community engagement, environmental sustainability, and a high quality of life, Vermilion is a model for other municipalities looking to thrive in contemporary times.

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ Vermilion, Alberta www.vermilion.ca

Economic diversification is key to Vermilion's longterm growth and stability. The town is actively working to attract a diverse range of industries and businesses. The town's leadership emphasizes diversifying the economy to create a resilient and sustainable community. Attracting different types of businesses can provide more job opportunities and economic stability.

The town's strategy includes attracting technology, manufacturing, and renewable energy businesses. With the infrastructure and resources to support various industries, the goal is to create a diverse and thriving economy that benefits all residents.



# education





ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' AS

# CHAMPIONIC CATHOLIC EDUCATION

SUPPORTING AND ADVOCATING FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION ACROSS ONTARIO THROUGH STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND DEDICATED LEADERSHIP.

AT A GLANCE

# ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

**WHAT:** Advocacy and support organization for Catholic school boards and

trustees

WHERE: Ontario, Canada

WEBSITE: www.ocsta.on.ca

comprehensive mandate is carried out through

various avenues of support and advocacy.



#### ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

Patrick Daly, the association's President, articulates the OCSTA's role with clear commitment. "Our primary mission is inspired by gospel values to protect and promote publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario," he says. This mission manifests in multiple ways, from professional development and governance training to faith formation for trustees. "We support them in many ways, both in terms of professional development, governance training, and equally important, faith formation."

The association hosts several significant events throughout the year to bolster this support, such as an annual trustee seminar in January and an annual general meeting in late April or May. Additionally, there are regional meetings each fall, where OCSTA representatives travel across the province to engage with trustees in five distinct regions. "Each fall, we travel around the province, visiting trustees in each of the five regions, to share information and provide professional development and faith formation opportunities."

The OCSTA also facilitates speaker series events several times a year, offering virtual gatherings on a broad spectrum of topics to assist trustees. Daly shares a recent example, "We just earlier this week had a media training session for the chairs of each of the 29 Catholic school boards."

Advocacy is another crucial component of the OCSTA's work. Daly highlights their regular interactions with Ministry of Education officials, the Minister of Education, cabinet ministers, and MPPs to advocate for Catholic education and respond to legislative actions. "We meet regularly with government leaders and representatives to promote Catholic education and to respond to certain pieces of legislation or actions on the part of the government."

Over the past decade, the OCSTA has also taken on the role of the legal bargaining agent for all 29 Catholic school boards. Daly notes, "We bargain for all 29 Catholic school boards. We represent them in provincial bargaining and at a number of provincial tables with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, who represents all the teachers in our school boards."



#### LEGISLATIVE CHALLENGES AND ADVOCACY

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association is deeply engaged in addressing legislative matters that directly impact its members. This engagement reflects the OCSTA's unwavering dedication to advocating for and supporting Catholic education across Ontario. Its involvement spans consultations, presentations, and direct advocacy efforts, ensuring that the interests of Catholic school boards are well-represented and protected.

Daly explains, "We are at all times dealing with various issues. Recently, we've participated in the annual grants for student needs consultation with the Ministry of Education." This annual consultation is crucial as it allows the OCSTA to present a comprehensive brief on the challenges faced by Catholic school boards regarding funding, accompanied by specific recommendations. Moreover, it has developed a



brief for the provincial government's pre-budget consultation to influence the upcoming budget, presenting these recommendations to the Finance Committee next week.

One significant legislative issue the OCSTA has addressed over the past several months is Bill 98. Daly notes, "It's a significant piece of legislation introduced and passed by the provincial government, covering a wide range of areas." These areas include provincial priorities, increased authority for the minister, performance appraisals of directors of education, and the disposition of properties. The OCSTA has actively participated in consultations on various aspects of this bill and the subsequent regulations.

The association's advocacy efforts extend to regular meetings with MPPs to promote the successes of Catholic schools and highlight the priorities and challenges faced by Catholic school boards. "We meet regularly, one, two, sometimes more, MPPs a week to promote the great things happening in Catholic schools across the province," Daly shares. These continuous efforts aim to build relationships and positively influence policy decisions affecting Catholic education.

# PROMOTING CATHOLIC EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Beyond legislative advocacy, the OCSTA promotes the initiatives and successes of Catholic education throughout Ontario. This includes not only the achievements of the schools but also the broader impact of Catholic education on the community.

Daly emphasizes the scale of Catholic education in the province: "We represent 29 Catholic school boards, approximately 1,320 Catholic schools, educating over 550,000 students and employing over 59,000 staff. We represent over 2 million Catholic ratepayers in the province." This extensive network shows the significant role Catholic education plays in Ontario's educational landscape.

The OCSTA coordinates several key initiatives, such as Catholic Education Week each year in early May. "We have a theme, a Catholic Education Week song, and distribute extensive material. The Catholic school boards and the schools within their systems celebrate and promote the good that's happening in our schools that week," Daly explains. These celebrations highlight the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and human formation that Catholic schools provide to every child, reinforcing the positive contributions of Catholic education to society.

# DIRECT SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The OCSTA also plays a vital role in supporting Catholic school boards and individual trustees through a variety of resources and events. These initiatives ensure that trustees are well-equipped to fulfill their roles and address the needs of the Catholic education community effectively.

Daly emphasizes, "Our January trustee seminar, AGM, and regional meetings see hundreds of trustees



attending and benefiting from these sessions." The OCSTA distributes numerous briefs and memos, ensuring trustees have access to the materials they need. Daly believes in the importance of listening to the trustees and responding adequately to their needs by providing the necessary resources. "We provide additional documents or adjust priorities based on what we're hearing from them."

# INVESTMENT IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

To further support its members, the OCSTA makes direct investments in various priority areas, including sports, arts, and extracurricular activities, reflecting the broad spectrum of interests and needs within Catholic schools. These activities play a significant role in the holistic development of students, contributing to their intellectual, physical, and spiritual growth.

"Publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario take great pride in providing Christ-centered learning opportunities," Daly states. He highlights the wide range of programs offered, from sports and arts to student councils and clubs, emphasizing the success of their teams and choirs at local, provincial, and national levels. "We can take great pride in the quality of programming, both during the school day and in co-curricular extracurricular activities."

Despite these successes, the OCSTA faces several challenges that require continuous effort and advocacy. Daly mentions issues such as the rising costs related to sick leave and staff absenteeism, which have significantly increased over the past few years. Additionally, the new transportation funding formula introduced last year presents some areas in need of improvement. "Special education funding has been a long-standing issue due to the complexity of student needs today," Daly notes. He also points out the challenge of capital funding to keep up with costs.

To assuage these challenges, the OCSTA maintains



a strong relationship with the Ministry of Education and government officials, working collaboratively to address these challenges. Daly emphasizes the importance of listening to member boards to understand their current challenges and priorities, which informs their advocacy efforts. "We believe it's important to identify challenges and recommend solutions, being part of bringing about positive change."

#### **BALANCING CHALLENGES AND REWARDS**

The role of President of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association involves navigating a complex array of responsibilities and priorities. Daly's reflections on his tenure provide a glimpse into the personal and professional dimensions of his leadership.

Daly admits, "The most challenging aspect is an interesting question." He credits his ability to manage these challenges to the incredible support system around him. "I have been blessed to be surrounded by amazing people, starting with my wife, Carol, and my children. The people I serve with, my fellow trustees, both in Hamilton and across the province, have been a source of great admiration and mentorship."

He also speaks highly of the staff at the OCSTA office, particularly Sharon and her small but dedicated team. "Their inspiring commitment to Catholic education and goodness far outweighs any particular challenges," he states. Daly finds immense reward in these relationships and the collective effort towards a common goal, which has always been a source of strength and motivation for him.

#### PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

As the OCSTA looks ahead to 2024, Daly outlines the top priorities amidst numerous competing demands. The focus remains on providing robust support and services for Catholic trustees, ensuring they are wellequipped to handle the increasing complexities of their roles. "The complexity of our role has increased significantly over the last number of years, so it's always a priority to make sure we're serving them well," he explains.

Financial challenges continue to be a significant focus, with efforts aimed at realizing positive changes in areas such as funding and resources. Additionally, ongoing negotiations with the Catholic Teachers Association are a pressing concern. "Achieving essential agreements and ultimately ratifying local agreements with all of our employee groups is a real priority," Daly says. He emphasizes the importance of ensuring that teachers, principals, and support staff are treated and compensated fairly while maintaining the quality of service to students.

Throughout these endeavors, Daly underscores the collective effort involved. "It's me being part of a really good and strong team," he acknowledges. The shared dedication and collaborative spirit of the board of directors, staff, and trustees form the backbone of the OCSTA's mission, driving its efforts to continue supporting Catholic education across Ontario.

ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION

BREAKING BARRIERS AND CREATING GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE.

AT A GLANCE

## **ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**WHAT:** Innovative educational institution focusing on real-world experience

and global opportunities

WHERE: Ansonia, Connecticut

WEBSITE: www.ansonia.org



#### ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

students as civic-minded, globally aware citizens.

Dr. Joseph DiBacco, Superintendent of Schools, passionately articulates the district's philosophy: "Our overall goal is to create very civic-minded, well-rounded citizens ready for the global economy. We want to prepare good citizens and community stewards, willing to give back, work hard, and be part of the global marketplace." This vision is being realized through a dynamic curriculum that adapts to the shifting needs of the workforce, ensuring students are equipped with relevant skills and experiences.

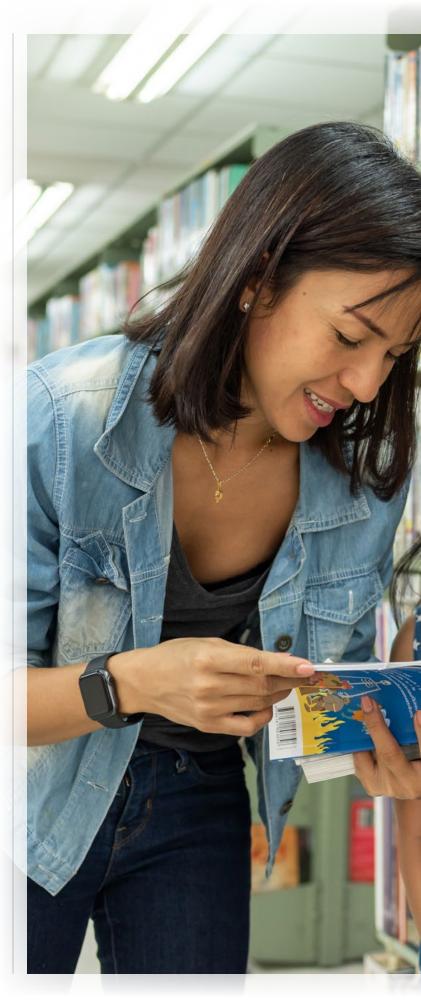
A significant aspect of this vision involves creating career pathways tailored to local and global demands. Dr. DiBacco explains, "We're shaping our curriculum to meet the changing needs of the workforce in Connecticut. We have programs with South Korea where our students do projects overseas. They will participate in a STEM science fair in South Korea this year." These international collaborations give students a global perspective, which is essential for succeeding in today's interconnected world.

Embracing its historical manufacturing roots, Ansonia Public Schools is reviving and modernizing this legacy through practical, hands-on learning experiences. "Ansonia has a rich manufacturing history," Dr. DiBacco shares. "By creating career pathways, we're bringing our history back to life. Students are now doing internships at places like Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company and Farrel Pomini, connecting our historical manufacturing background with modern industry needs." This initiative, which he dubs "Ansonia 2.0," bridges the past with the future, offering students valuable opportunities to engage with prestigious companies and gain real-world experience.

#### COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS INTEGRATION

Ansonia Public Schools is spearheading a collaborative approach that bridges the gap between education and industry, ensuring students are well-prepared for their future careers. Dennis Proto, the School to College and Career Outreach Advisor, is pivotal in this effort.

"In Ansonia Public Schools, I handle community-toschool networking, business-to-school networking,





and state organizations-to-school networking," Proto explains. These partnerships range from the Connecticut Business and Industry Association to significant organizations like Sikorsky Aircraft and Teamsters Local 1150 to local entities such as the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce, Microboard and The WorkPlace. Proto and Dr. DiBacco work closely to turn these partnerships into tangible opportunities for students.

Proto emphasizes the business-like methodology that drives these initiatives, a vision inspired by Dr. DiBacco. "Profitability for me changed from bottom line dollars and cents to student success," Proto remarks. This shift reflects a broader goal: transforming educational experiences into meaningful, practical outcomes for students.

Dr. DiBacco's student-oriented philosophy is at the heart of Ansonia's educational model. "He wants opportunities for our students, so they never have to walk into, 'I didn't know that existed," Proto says. To foster this level of awareness and engagement, Dr. DiBacco encourages direct interaction with students. This is facilitated through a flat organizational structure that allows for agility and proactive decision-making, free from the constraints of bureaucracy that often hinder other school systems.

One innovative strategy to maintain this direct line of communication is the creation of a student focus group. "Karen Phipps, Ansonia High School's lead CTE teacher and I created a student focus group consisting of student leaders from each pathway," Proto shares. These monthly meetings with Dr. DiBacco serve as a platform for students to generate ideas on how to market better and enhance their programs. The initiative empowers students and involves them in the operational aspects of their education.

#### **EMPOWERING THROUGH STEM**

Ansonia Public Schools is creating an inclusive and innovative environment where STEM and STEAM programming begin early and continue to grow throughout the students' educational journey. Dr. DiBacco elaborates.

"Both of our elementary schools have dedicated



maker space areas," he states. These spaces are designed for students to explore, create, and invent, providing them with the necessary materials to stimulate their problem-solving skills. Kids can make, do, play, invent," he emphasizes, highlighting the focus on practical, hands-on learning that prepares students for an unpredictable future where new inventions are constantly emerging.

The district's focus on STEM is particularly evident in its efforts to support underrepresented groups. "We've been highlighted in local news for our initiatives to expose students to STEM education," Dr. DiBacco notes. One such initiative is the Women in Engineering events at the middle school level, where engineers from Sikorsky engage with students, predominantly minority young women. These efforts have garnered attention for promoting diversity in traditionally male-dominated fields.

To further strengthen STEM education at the middle school level, Ansonia Public Schools has eliminated

traditional study halls. "We replaced study halls with a 15-week, self-guided program called TechTrep," Dr. DiBacco explains. This program offers a variety of classes, from 3D animation to robotics, coding, and entrepreneurship. "It gives students the choice to pursue their interests while maintaining a STEM focus," he adds.

Dr. DiBacco's commitment to inclusivity in education stems from his family experience. "I have three little girls, and my wife is from the Caribbean. Students of color and females often have the least access to STEM education," he shares. This personal connection drives his mission to ensure equal opportunities for all students, particularly those from low-income and diverse backgrounds.

# STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Investing in educational infrastructure is crucial for fostering a productive learning environment, and



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Henry J. Winters Elementary School Pawtucket. RI

Architecture

Ansonia Public Schools have strategically navigated this terrain. Dr. DiBacco sheds light on the financial mechanisms and investments that underpin the district's operations and growth.

"In Connecticut, our budget is a blend of local tax, state, and grant money," he explains. Currently operating with a nearly \$38 million budget, the district benefits from a mix of these revenue sources. Despite economic challenges, Ansonia Public Schools have remained financially stable throughout Dr. DiBacco's tenure, thanks to robust support from the local government and strategic financial decisions.

One key factor in this stability is the district's approach to health insurance. "We went to a self-funded consortium for our health insurance," Dr. DiBacco reveals. Partnering with Brown and Brown and utilizing the state's regional education service centers (RESCs), Ansonia joined a selective group of districts with low claim rates to form a self-funded group. This move has proven advantageous, allowing

the district to maintain a health reserve account and save money.

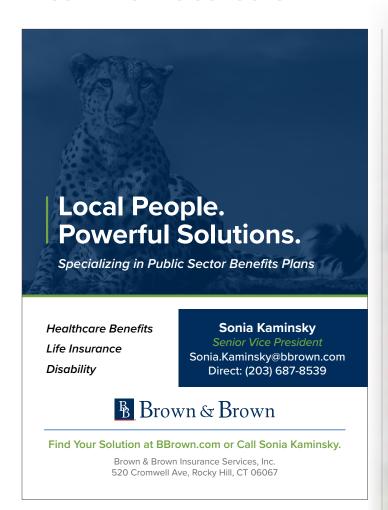
CA CO CT FL GA IA MA PA RI 860 657.8077 www.slamcoll.com

The district's financial prudence extends to its insurance strategies. "Insurance is a crapshoot," Dr. DiBacco admits. However, Ansonia has successfully navigated this uncertainty by implementing safeguards such as aggregate and individual stoploss measures. These precautions have protected the district from significant financial hits, ensuring continued progress and stability.

# BREAKING BARRIERS FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Ansonia Public Schools is committed to providing students with real-world experience and breaking down barriers to higher education. This commitment is rooted in Dr. DiBacco's background and vision for the district's future.

"I'm first generation in this country," he begins. "My parents were immigrants who sent three kids to



Boston College, and my brother went to MIT." This personal experience shapes his understanding of the challenges faced by first-generation students. "I support kids who are the first in their family to graduate from high school and attend university," he says, emphasizing the importance of eliminating barriers and creating opportunities for these students.

The district's focus on real-world experience is evident in its extensive network of co-op programs and partnerships. "We have several pathways, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, business, future educators, cybersecurity, and engineering," Proto highlights. Each pathway is designed to provide practical skills and industry exposure. For example, the healthcare pathway includes a Patient Care Technician and a Certified Nursing Assistant program, and the advanced manufacturing pathway covers various aspects of the industry.

"We're selective in our pathway choices," Dr. DiBacco explains. "We choose partners who support and foster



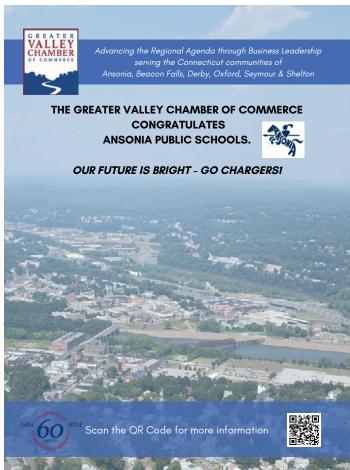
young talent." This careful selection ensures that students are placed in environments where they can thrive. "Griffin Hospital is our allied health partner, and we have a close relationship with their CEO, Pat Charmel," he adds, noting that the partnership has been particularly beneficial in addressing the increased demand for healthcare workers.

The district's innovative approach includes developing a grassroots model for internships. "Dennis and I were doing factory tours to identify companies that would foster on-the-job learning," Dr.



DiBacco says. Our patient care technician students, for example, complete their certifications and internship hours by their senior year, allowing them to enter PA programs and other advanced healthcare fields," he elaborates.

One of the standout programs is the partnership with Sikorsky Aircraft. "Our students who intern there make \$1,000 a week," Dr. DiBacco reveals. At the end of their internships, these students receive job offers where they can easily make \$60,000 plus a year. It's incredible to see high school students earning more



than \$60,000 right out of school," he remarks.

Dr. DiBacco envisions expanding these opportunities further. "I hope one day we can have juniors spend a couple of days a week in the field, and seniors spend even more time on internships," he says. This approach, which he calls the World of Work (WOW) program, aims to keep students engaged and provide practical skills that align with the needs of local businesses.

#### **FUTURE PRIORITIES**

Ansonia Public Schools is not just focusing on the present but strategically planning for a future where students are more engaged, informed, and globally connected. As Proto and Dr. DiBacco outline their priorities for the next 18 months, it becomes clear that the district is broadening student opportunities.

"We want them to understand the opportunity," Proto says. "We want to build on what we've done and increase student opportunities." This involves



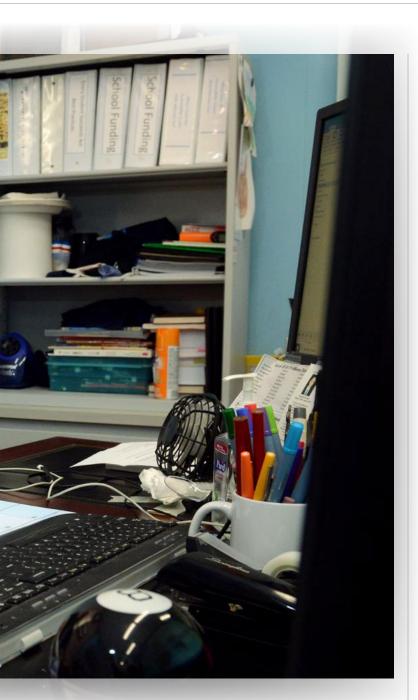
enhancing student-to-student and teacher-tostudent engagement, leveraging the dedication of long-term staff members who see the potential in every student. "Over the next 18 months, we aim to grow that opportunity spectrum for the kids," Proto adds.

Dr. DiBacco shares his vision for the district. "We are expanding our efforts globally," he states. "We hope to get certified to accept international students and facilitate exchanges where our students and teachers can go to other countries." This initiative aims to broaden students' horizons and invigorate them with a renewed sense of purpose and ambition.

"When our students come back, they have a renewed energy because they see what else is out there," he explains.

Another forward-thinking initiative involves preparing students for technological shifts. "We're looking into bringing electric engines into our schools," Dr. DiBacco shares. As the world moves towards electric vehicles, having students who can work on electric motors will be a significant advantage.

Moreover, Dr. DiBacco aims to introduce more civicminded tracks, including a law track to educate



students on advocacy and public service. "We want to teach students how to advocate for themselves and others and how to run for office if they choose," he says. This initiative aligns with the district's goal of preparing students for active and informed citizenship.

Dr. DiBacco finally highlights the importance of guest speakers in exposing students to diverse career paths. Industry leaders, including CEOs from the New York Liberty and the Red Sox, inspire students and often offer internships due to the students' genuine interest. He notes that 70% of Ansonia's workingage students support their families, emphasizing

the need for meaningful job opportunities. These interactions bridge education and employment, with students preferring high-paying, skilled jobs over minimum-wage ones. By connecting students with various industries, Ansonia Public Schools empowers them to envision and pursue brighter futures.

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WEBSITE:

www.btps.ca

# BUFFALO TRAIL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# BUILDINGONASTROR AT A GLANCE **BUFFALO TRAIL PUBLIC SCHOOLS** WHAT: Public school district offering comprehensive education and community-driven initiatives WHERE: Rural Alberta, Canada



about 525 teachers and support staff.

#### BUFFALO TRAIL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Known for its high student graduation and postsecondary transition rates, BTPS focuses on creating a supportive and effective learning environment. Governed by nine trustees representing different wards, the school division is committed to honoring its historical and cultural location on Treaty 6 territory.

Under the guidance of Superintendent Michelle Webb, BTPS is maximizing student learning within a nurturing, supportive framework. "Our mission," she explains, "is to provide a safe and caring environment supported by a highly effective team." This mission forms the backbone of BTPS's four-year education plan, shaping all decisions and initiatives within the district.

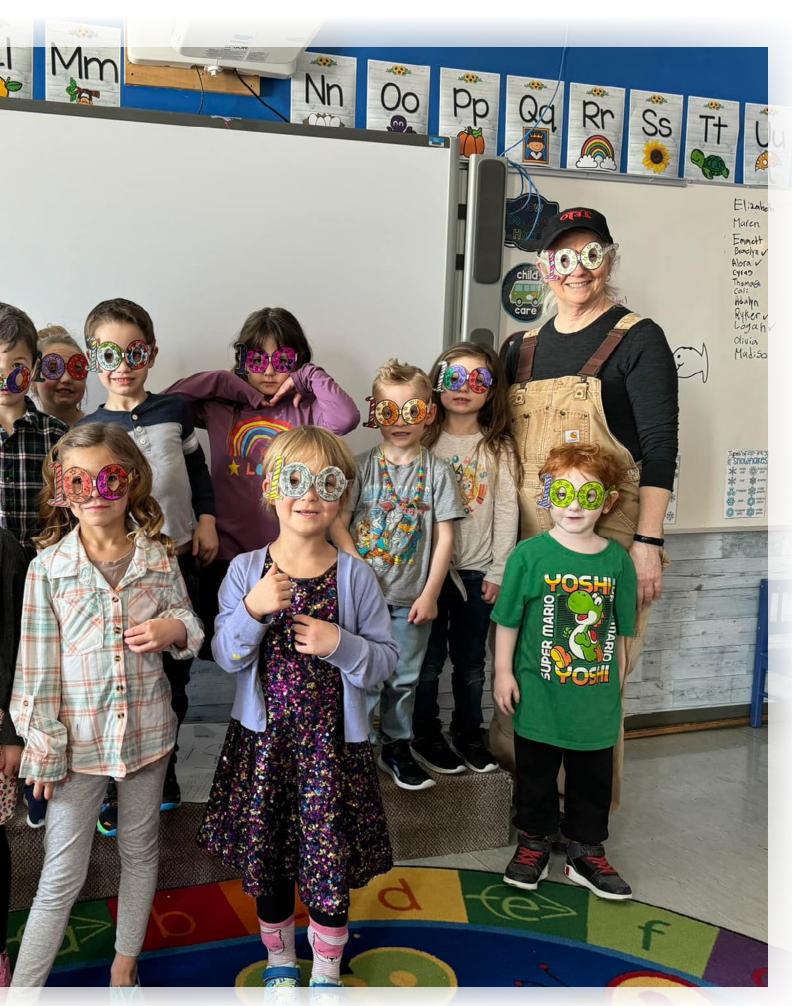
Assistant Superintendent James Trodden elaborates on this plan, highlighting three main priorities. "Firstly, we focus on supporting learning success for all students. This includes emphasizing strong numeracy and literacy skills, preparing students for life beyond K-12, and enriching the learning experiences provided by our exceptionally talented staff."

Trodden continues, "The second priority is fostering a safe and caring learning environment. We take pride in our rural culture, creating spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of both staff and student wellness." The third priority emphasizes the importance of community connections. "Building strong collaborations within our rural community is essential," says Trodden. "This involves connecting with families and various community partners to support our students effectively."

Webb points out how the district nurtures young learners in discussing early childhood programs. "We offer kindergarten programs with government-provided program unit funding to support services for three and four-year-olds in our communities."

Board Chair Kara Jackson adds, "We also have agreements with different communities to house preschool programs within our buildings. Although these preschools are not directly connected to Buffalo Trail Public Schools, they benefit from being in the same environment. This arrangement





fosters a holistic sense of continuity and safety as children progress from preschool to kindergarten and eventually graduate from our division."

## STEM AND SOFT SKILLS IN EARLY EDUCATION

At the forefront of educational innovation, Buffalo Trail Public Schools integrates STEM education with essential communication and literacy skills from the early grades. This dual focus aims to prepare students comprehensively for the future, blending cutting-edge science and technology initiatives with fundamental soft skills development.

Assistant Superintendent Trodden explains how these efforts stem from the Board's priority of achieving student success. "We are implementing a new science curriculum with dedicated funding. We're focusing on K-3 this year, and next year, we'll move to grades 4-6. Our approach combines curriculum alignment with technology and leverages our rural setting."

BTPS utilizes its rural advantages to make STEM education more relevant and hands-on. "Many of our schools have greenhouses that double as classrooms and agricultural programs that include livestock, such as chickens. When teaching about forests and trees, we take students out into nature, making learning immersive and practical," Trodden notes. He adds that one school will launch a land-based program for junior high students next year, where



core learning will occur outdoors, closely tied to the curriculum.

Trodden emphasizes that communication and literacy skills are embedded within all subjects. "Our focus on literacy and numeracy is evident from the start. Professional development for school leaders and teachers ensures these skills are integrated into everyday learning. Literacy and numeracy are part of the process of teaching science or social studies."

Addressing the learning gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, BTPS has implemented screening assessments for young students. "These assessments guide interventions and support on an individualized level, and we are already seeing

improvements," Trodden reports. The district has also developed instructional profiles to gauge student cognitive engagement, which has led to notable gains in learning depth across literacy, numeracy, and technology.

#### BRIDGING EDUCATION AND REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

In addition to its strong foundation in early education, Buffalo Trail Public Schools is committed to equipping older students with the skills and experiences necessary for their future careers. The school district emphasizes practical, real-world experiences that prepare students for their future careers. Partnerships with local businesses and higher education institutions are crucial in providing these opportunities.

Superintendent Webb describes a significant collaboration with Lakeland College, which has been instrumental in offering diverse high school career

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and technology training programs. "We're fortunate to have Lakeland College within our division. They provide robust career and technology training to students in grades 10 to 12. Programs include mechanics, welding, carpentry, electrical, esthetics, hairstyling, and interior design," she explains.

Moreover, through this partnership, grade 12 students benefit from university-level courses in psychology and sociology. "These courses are free for our students and transferable to universities nationwide. Some of our students achieve higher grades than their first-year university counterparts," Webb proudly notes. Additionally, students can complete a full year of apprenticeship in welding and automotive technician courses, culminating in writing their apprenticeship and training exams.

Trodden expands on the variety of work experience programs available. "We have a robust work experience program where students partner with various job sites to learn essential skills. This can range across multiple fields, leading to internship programs for more in-depth exposure. Additionally, we offer registered apprenticeship programs, where students work alongside journeymen, logging hours that count toward their future qualifications."

One unique aspect of BTPS's approach is the green certificate program tailored for students interested in agribusiness. "Our students can specialize in areas such as cow and calf, poultry, grain, and equine," Trodden explains. "They undergo rigorous training and testing, ultimately earning a green certificate, which is recognized and valued by colleges and businesses."

# STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Beyond its innovative educational programs, Buffalo Trail Public Schools strategically invests in critical areas to support and enhance the learning environment. These investments are geared towards strengthening high school programming, transportation, and facility maintenance to ensure education quality and students' well-being across its rural communities.

Peter Neale, Secretary-Treasurer, emphasizes the



district's unique approach to high school education. "We prioritize high school programming within all our school communities, avoiding the composite high school model where students are bused to a central hub. This means investing in synchronous and asynchronous learning programs to ensure that even small schools with around 150 K-12 students offer a comprehensive education," he explains.

Neale also highlights the district's investments in transportation, which supports over half of its students daily across a vast 15,000 km² area. "We allocate nearly \$7 million annually to maintain our transportation system. One of our Board's success metrics is keeping student bus ride times to no more than 75 minutes per trip. To achieve this, we have



increased our bus routes by three, totaling 94 routes," he notes.

Investing in facility maintenance is another critical area for BTPS. "Maintaining numerous small community schools requires significant financial resources. Our operating budget allocates about \$6 million for this purpose, with \$2 million dedicated to custodial costs alone. This ensures our schools remain clean, safe, and functional," Neale adds.

#### **CULTIVATING EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS**

At Buffalo Trail Public Schools, the onboarding and continuous professional development of teachers is a top priority, ensuring that staff are wellequipped to deliver high-quality education. Assistant Superintendent Trodden explains the meticulous process:

"Our stakeholders emphasized the importance of highly effective staff, and the Board has incorporated this into our education plan, investing significantly in it. We onboard new teachers with a dedicated day focused on building on their strengths, a process that continues throughout their careers. We host two full division learning days for robust instruction and five learning days at the school level."

BTPS employs innovation coaches who work alongside teachers, aiding in lesson planning and classroom instruction. "These coaches guide teachers

#### BUFFALO TRAIL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

directly, helping them elevate their instructional methods. School leaders, acting as instructional leaders, observe student engagement levels and support teachers in enhancing their teaching strategies," he adds.

Board Chair Jackson highlights the engagement and continuous learning pursued by teachers. "Our staff actively seeks professional development opportunities within and outside the division. The feedback we receive indicates that teachers appreciate the value we place on their training and development, which also benefits student outcomes."

Jackson also highlights the importance of teacher wellness and retention. "We hope to attract and retain talented educators by valuing and supporting our teachers. This commitment to their development and well-being positively impacts their performance and ultimately benefits our students."

Trodden points out the Board's active role in professional learning. "Our Board members, including Chair Jackson, attend division learning days, modeling engagement and support for our staff. This presence fosters a collaborative environment and reinforces the importance of ongoing professional development."

Jackson agrees, noting the significance of Board involvement. "Our presence at these events signals our teachers that we value education and their professional growth. It helps build strong relationships and encourages, contributing to the overall success of our students."

# KEY PARTNERSHIPS AND FUTURE INITIATIVES

As Buffalo Trail Public Schools continues to innovate and expand, its partnerships with community stakeholders and strategic priorities are pivotal in shaping the district's future.

Board Chair Jackson highlights Lakeland College as a crucial partner. "Lakeland College provides our students with valuable opportunities to enroll in diverse courses, enhancing their academic and career prospects," she states. The longstanding collaboration with Lakeland College stands out due to the breadth





and depth of programs offered, benefiting students across various disciplines.

Looking ahead, BTPS has several key priorities for the next 18 months. Jackson expresses excitement about the anticipated construction of a new Wainwright Elementary School. "This has been a top capital priority for our division for decades. We're in the design planning phases and expect support from Alberta Education to break ground soon," she notes.

In addition to new facilities, BTPS is exploring innovative educational pathways. "We are developing collegiate partnerships and collaborations with other school divisions to leverage expertise, professionals, and facilities," Jackson explains. This initiative aligns with the Ministry of Education's goal to support careers in high demand and will benefit students not only within BTPS but also across Alberta.

Superintendent Webb concludes with the district's ongoing focus on wellness. "We are committed to the wellness of our staff and students, ensuring it remains at the forefront of our efforts. In rural Alberta, it's essential to advocate for the presence of professionals who can provide the necessary support," she affirms.

By promoting strong partnerships and focusing on strategic initiatives, BTPS is poised to continue providing exceptional education and support to its community, ensuring a bright future for its students and staff.

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

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# JACKSON LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

# TOPOFTHE

PIONEERING LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION IN EDUCATION



AT A GLANCE

JACKSON LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

**WHAT:** A District with a Progressive Approach to Leadership and

Succession Planning

WHERE: Stark County, Ohio

**WEBSITE:** www.jackson.stark.k12.oh.us





#### **PILLARS OF SUCCESS**

The district's operational and strategic approach is anchored in five core values, referred to by Superintendent, Christopher DiLoreto, as their "main thing."

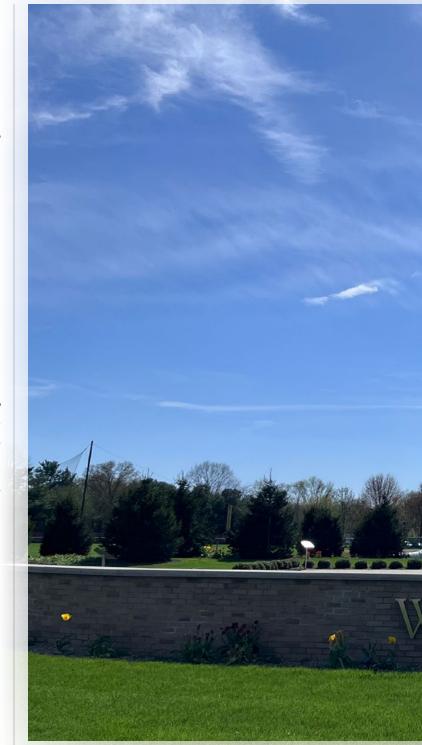
He says the foremost value is academic performance, emphasizing student achievement and educational excellence. Equally important is resource management, encompassing the oversight of the district's 650 employees, a vast 1 million square feet of facilities across six school buildings, nearly 300 acres of grounds, and a fleet of 80 school buses.

Governance is another cornerstone, ensuring compliance with federal and state laws, and collective bargaining agreements. DiLoreto maintains that communication and collaboration also play a vital role, and the district focuses on efficient interactions with stakeholders, forming partnerships with booster clubs, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations. Lastly, he highlights the priority on safety and security, where the emphasis includes safeguarding students, staff, and facilities while addressing the importance of mental health support. "We strive to be the best in those five areas, that we refer to as our 'main thing," DiLoreto affirms.

#### **GROWING LEADERS FROM WITHIN**

In addressing the leadership vacuum prevalent in public education, Jackson Local Schools has undertaken a proactive approach to succession planning, beginning when Superintendent DiLoreto and Assistant Superintendent, Barry Mason were approached by the Board of Education about enrolling in an MBA program. DiLoreto recounts, "That was really to look at what are the best business practices you can incorporate in a public school setting. We went through a traditional MBA that was not tailored to the K-12 public school sector."

He notes that during this time, the challenge of preparing for leadership transitions became evident, as many experienced staff members approached retirement. As a solution, the district began to embrace the philosophy of "building our bench" rather than relying on external hires, especially for roles requiring a deep understanding of public education. "We started to look at how we could



partner with a local university and customize an MBA. The accreditation that a university must get for any degree, we certainly understand, but we wanted to make it more relevant," he details. "As an example, if I'm sitting in a traditional MBA course, and I am analyzing a case study regarding the marketing of Starbucks or something that isn't similar to the K-12 public school sector; compared to if I could market



our school district using those similar Starbucks concepts and participate in a collaborative discussion with colleagues in a classroom."

This led to a strategic partnership with Walsh University, and Stark County Educational Service Center, to develop a customized MBA program tailored to the needs of K-12 education. "It's a rather unique journey. This is a pioneering approach that offers a targeted MBA. We want to ensure we're developing our leaders with those MBA concepts and tying it to a K-12 public school system," DiLoreto relays.

Currently, a cohort of nine students are participating in the program, 5 of which are employees of Jackson



Local Schools. "It has been beneficial because we're growing our leaders and working on those business practices that they're learning about. The relevancy is right here within our local public school district, Jackson Local," says DiLoreto, who maintains that this initiative not only fosters internal leadership development but also aligns with contemporary business practices.

Todd Porter, Director of Communications and Data Analytics for the district, and also a participant in the MBA cohort, describes his experience in the program, sharing, "It's really kind of developed a nice collegial atmosphere with all of us in the program from Jackson and our colleagues from the Stark County Educational Service Center. When you talk about financial accounting and management, instead of looking at a publicly traded company's P&L sheet,

we're looking at a school district's five-year forecast as an example. We are able to get granular and look at where revenue is coming from, what projections are, where expenditures are coming from, and how might those evolve. So, it's a much more applicable course."

#### AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

By investing in their employees' education and creating clear career progression paths, Jackson Local Schools aims to cultivate a pool of skilled leaders ready to step into more significant roles within the district. "As we hire people, we are identifying who are the best and brightest, we're retaining those people, we're investing in them to get their MBAs. And then there is a path forward, a career ladder for them to continue to grow into other leadership roles

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within our school district," DiLoreto asserts.

He acknowledges that the process of identifying and developing these future leaders often involves evaluating candidates who are already part of the team. He explains that while traditional hiring practices involve a rigorous interview process, internal candidates—who have already demonstrated their abilities over time—are continuously being assessed through their day-to-day performance. "We always talk about how you're interviewing every day for jobs that don't even exist yet," he says.

To foster this internal development, Jackson Local Schools has implemented a strategy of nurturing its talent. This includes providing formal education and clear career progression paths to retain and advance employees. He details, "Currently, we have two MBAs, myself, and our assistant superintendent. By this time next year, we'll be adding five more for a total of seven in our public school system here at Jackson Local." These include those in roles such as building-









level principals, the district's treasurer, and the Director of Communications and Data Analytics. "This cannot be done without a progressive school board that's forward-leaning, who are incorporating MBAs in their respective industries," DiLoreto underscores. For example, Jackson Local Board of Education member Christopher Goff is the President and CEO of Employers Health. His company has integrated an MBA program and Goff was the catalyst for introducing the concept to Jackson Local Schools.

#### TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

As a high-performing school district, Jackson Local Schools does not face the same staffing shortages as other regions. "We are a wealthy suburb, here in Northeast Ohio. We have many, many potential candidates that are ecstatic to work for our school system," DiLoreto said. To manage and support new employees, particularly during their formative years in education, the district has implemented a robust onboarding process, conducting regular surveys and check-ins to monitor and address potential burnout



and to support the professional growth of new hires. "As we're beginning to see how they're working, we're talking to them about going back and getting their next degree and talking to them about their career ladders," he said. "We're trying to build the bench there as well, for who's our next department chair, or who can now come into entry-level management." The goal is to build a pipeline of skilled individuals ready to step into management or specialized positions as they become available.

Porter also notes the district's strong reputation, as evidenced by the recent social studies opening which had 60 applicants. The commitment to supporting new teachers through mentorship and ensuring a balanced work-life environment is well-recognized and attracts top candidates. "Our



Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Dr. Monica Myers, does a great job of supporting our new teachers with mentor teachers," he maintains.

While the district prefers to promote from within, DiLoreto recognizes that there are times when it is of value to hire externally for specific roles. "As an example, for somebody who is our Director of Safety and Security, we're looking at maybe the agency of the FBI, or the Ohio State Highway Patrol, for those kinds of roles."

#### A LEGACY OF INNOVATION

As Jackson Local Schools continues to innovate and lead, it sets a high benchmark for educational excellence and leadership development. The district's proactive and strategic initiatives promise a bright



future, not just for its students but for the entire educational community.

In DiLoreto's words, "Rather than invest in our employees and then for them to leave us, we're taking our best and brightest, investing in them, growing them, retaining them, and ensuring they see a career ladder in front of them." This pioneering effort is a testament to Jackson Local Schools' ongoing commitment to excellence and innovation in education.

#### PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

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## ROMEO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

# TOP-TIER EDUCE INMAGOMB CONTY, I

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AT A GLANCE

### **ROMEO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

**WHAT:** An innovative and engaged K-12 school district

WHERE: Macomb County, Michigan

WEBSITE: www.romeok12.org



#### A BULLDOGS COMMUNITY

The district, unified under the Bulldog mascot, emphasizes a strong sense of belonging and mutual support. "You'd be hard-pressed to have a conversation about Romeo Community Schools or the Romeo area in general without hearing the words family and community," portrays Superintendent Dr. Todd Robinson.

"We're a very tight-knit community here. It doesn't matter whether you're one of our five elementary buildings, or our comprehensive middle school and high school, everyone is a Bulldog."

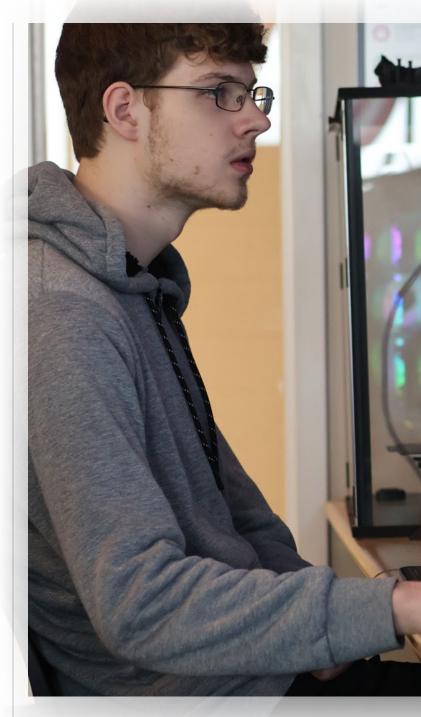
In 2022, Romeo Community Schools launched a strategic plan that included reaffirming the core values of respect, teamwork, balance, integrity, and fun. "We do believe school should be fun, and not just for students, but also for the adults that work with them," Robinson affirms.

Complementing these core values, the district embraces an annual theme; the theme for the 2023-24 school year was "Choose Joy." Says Robinson, "We're trying to focus, at all levels of the organization, on just being grateful for the opportunity to work with the children that we do in this district, to partner with businesses in the larger community, and to best serve our students and prepare them for college, career, and life."

# STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

One of the standout priorities in the strategic plan is the increased focus on safety and mental wellness, particularly in the wake of the 2021 tragedy in the nearby community of Oxford. "That has had a dramatic impact on us and surrounding districts," Robinson acknowledges. "We began to intentionally connect what were traditional school safety efforts with this idea of wellness and mental health, and not just for our students, but also for our employees."

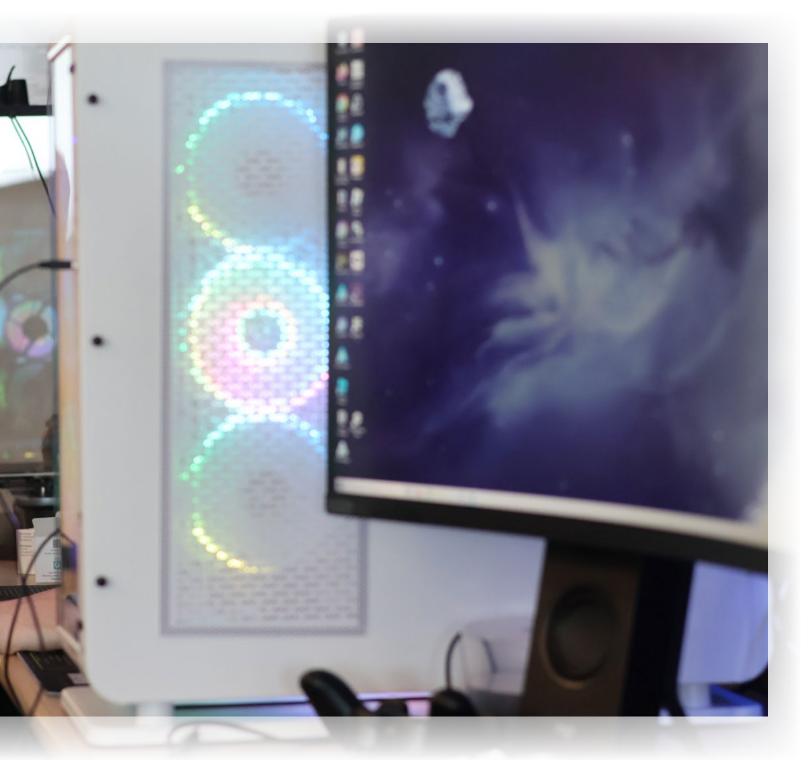
As part of these efforts school resource officers have been added at the middle and high school, a welcome presence not only for additional security, but also as positive role models for students. "That has been a blessing to us, to just have another positive adult in



the building that students can go to when they have a concern or otherwise," Robinson conveys.

RCS provides a wide variety of mental health and wellness resources, from electronic information to informative events like the recent State of the District, which offered breakout sessions for parents on topics such as social media and smartphone use.

"Most importantly, we want to make sure that every child has at least one adult advocate that they feel a direct connection to so that if there are concerns or



troubles they're dealing with, there is someone they can go to, to share that information with," stresses Robinson. "Naturally, that could be our teachers or our counselors, but we also think our bus drivers, our paraprofessionals, and our security staff are adults that can connect with kids too."

Federal funding provided during the pandemic brought an opportunity for the district to bring additional professionally certified mental health staff on board. Robinson notes, "With those funds expiring

this fall, this year's budget cycle is intentionally trying to maintain all the additional counselors, social workers, and psychologists that we added with those federal ESSER dollars so that we don't lose a beat in terms of the support staff that we have for students."

#### THE ACADEMIES AT ROMEO

In 2017 Romeo Community Schools became the first officially designated Ford Next Generation Learning (NGL) community in Michigan, an organization

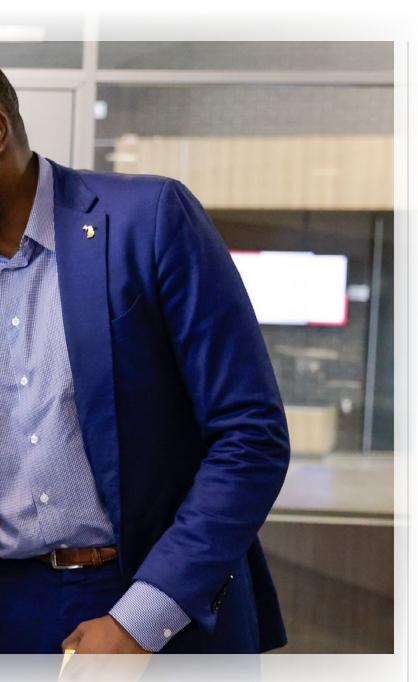


that works with school districts across the country and internationally, helping to prepare students for life after high school. Through this initiative, the Academies at Romeo were born, bringing comprehensive, career-focused learning to RCS.

The district collaborated with the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department to identify regional job opportunities and emerging sectors, ensuring that students would be equipped to live and work in the area after graduation. This led to the formation of three academies, The Academy of Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation (BEI), The Academy of Design, Engineering and Manufacturing

(DEM), and The Academy of Health, Human and Public Service (HHP). Each of these offers a series of distinct pathways for students to follow, based on their areas of skill and interest.

Dr. Robinson explains, "When we talk about the academies, we're talking about a wall-to-wall experience. What is different at Romeo High School is every kid is a career tech ed student. They spend their freshman year researching a ton of careers and learning more about themselves, their strengths, and their interests, and they make some choices. They put in their top two or three choices for an academy and pathway for the rest of their high school experience."



Currently, plans are underway to introduce academies at Romeo Middle School that emphasize service and community engagement. "We're going to be partnering with nonprofit and community-based organizations, so our middle school students will have an experience of understanding what some sectors are in the nonprofit world, and then engage with those partners, whether it be in the classroom or outside in their environment," describes Assistant Superintendent Jennifer McFarlane. This will culminate in an eighth-grade Change Maker Challenge, where students will present a plan to make positive changes in the community. "They can change the world at that age, and we're just

so excited to be able to make a difference in our community with our middle school kids," she asserts.

# EMBRACING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Romeo Community Schools has established strong partnerships to expand dual enrollment and career technical education (CTE) opportunities for its students. These include Macomb Community College, Oakland Community College, and Oakland University. This year, a collaboration with Northwood University introduced an option for BEI Academy students to enroll in a semester-long business class.

In addition to educational institutions, RCS values the support of over 240 local businesses that bolster its CTE programs, providing hands-on experience. TK Mold and Engineering is one such company, offering apprenticeship programs for students following the advanced manufacturing pathway. Architecture and engineering firm Anderson, Eckstein and Westrick. is another example, providing internships where





students in their senior year can gain valuable workbased learning experience and receive payment.

Within the HHP Academy, the district offers a Certified Medical Assistant pathway, where students gain valuable experience working in hospital and senior care environments like WellBridge of Romeo. "We also have an EMT program. Through that pathway, we've had students partner with some of our firehouses," shares McFarlane. "I was just talking to a senior who has recently finished up her clinicals with Bruce Township in some ride-alongs for her EMT hours that she's logging, so she can get certified when she takes the exam this summer."

#### **MOVING FORWARD**

The Romeo community has continually invested in its schools, approving bonds in 2016 and 2021 totaling nearly \$170 million. These funds have modernized facilities across the district, including the construction of a new high school, consolidation of middle schools, and enhanced elementary buildings.



"We have dedicated STEM classrooms that we are either building as new additions or renovating space within our elementary schools," describes Dr. Robinson.

"Currently one of the exciting projects that we have is we're building a STEM and robotics center on our middle school campus," he adds. "That will be the home of our high school robotics and middle school robotics teams, but also will be a location to support instruction during the school day."



As a one-to-one district since 2014, RCS is consistently embracing technology and efforts continue to focus on integrating AI into the curriculum.

"We know in business and industry, they might be leveraging artificial intelligence more than we are currently," McFarlane recounts. "We also are trying to ensure that our students are safe, and our teachers are safe within that platform." Through partnerships with companies like L&L Products, and initiatives like Project Lead the Way, the district has enhanced

STEM programs across all levels. Elementary students engage in weekly tech sessions, middle schoolers explore courses like design, robotics, and medical detectives, and high schoolers participate in advanced programs, including a new course in aviation and drone operation.

Looking ahead, Dr. Robinson says the district has structured its strategic plan around three key focus areas: teaching and learning, safety and wellness, and fostering a community of collaboration. Community





engagement is a priority, and RCS's podcast, "Keeping up with 'R' Community," has proven to be a successful avenue for showcasing various aspects of district life.

"It provides content for parents and community, but we're also highlighting student leadership, student success, safety initiatives," he remarks. "We're also capitalizing on bringing more attention to elements of our strategic efforts, so people can get a little snapshot of what's going on in our school district."

Romeo Community Schools continues to raise the bar, as it embraces innovation and opportunity while advancing the best interests of its students, staff, and community.

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