

# NORTHEAST ARKANSAS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

## Annual Report 2019

We appreciate your support of economic development in Jonesboro and Craighead County. 2019 was a year of solid activity and prosperity in our ever-changing and growing city. This annual report contains key highlights from 2019 and reflects our economic development partners' continued focus on the implementation of our strategic plan for economic growth and working to ensure its success.

Sincerely,  
Al M. Heringer III, Chairman

### BUSINESS ATTRACTION

Two new manufacturing industries located in the Craighead Technology Park in 2019. **Risever Machinery, LLC**, celebrated the grand opening of their new facility in October. Risever manufactures heavy machinery for the construction industry and will employ 130. **Delta Peanut, LLC**, held a groundbreaking for the first peanut shelling facility in the state of Arkansas in August. Delta Peanut is currently under construction, making a \$70 million investment in our city. They will employ 130. **Precision Digital Printing** finished construction of their new facility in the Jonesboro Industrial Park and started operations. This cutting-edge manufacturing company digitally prints on any type of box for companies. The **Craighead County Crisis Stabilization Unit** opened in September to respond to individuals suffering a mental health crisis.

**Opportunity Zones** were created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and are designed to spur economic development in specific areas by providing tax benefits to investors. Jonesboro has three such areas designated by Governor Hutchinson – an area that covers the Craighead Technology Park, the downtown area, and the A-State area. Our economic development partners worked to promote and provide information about the Opportunity Zones and outlining the benefits.

Jonesboro has targeted five industries for recruitment. They are: **manufacturing, agri-business, healthcare, professional services, and logistics**. Recruitment activity increased in 2019 and included visits with over 20 consultants, trade shows, and working with a lead generation company to meet with companies that are growing and have specific plans for expansions or relocations. To help in these recruiting efforts, Jonesboro Unlimited hired **Mike Philpot**, as the Vice President of Economic Development.

### BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Our existing companies led the way in 2019 with growth and expansions. **St. Bernards Healthcare** completed the third phase of their master facility plan with the opening of a new surgical and intensive care tower at the hospital. Representing a \$103 million investment, the tower features 14 surgical suites and 46 intensive care units. **Ritter Communications** started construction on an \$8 million data center in Jonesboro, **First National Bank** held a grand opening for their FNB Financial Centre, **Jonesboro Orthopedics & Sports Medicine** started construction on a new office facility on Main Street, **Nice-Pak** recognized their 10-year anniversary in Jonesboro with a celebration event, **Kenney Manufacturing** started construction on a 130,000 square foot expansion of their facility on Krueger Drive, and **Corinth Coca-Cola** recognized their success in Jonesboro with a celebration event with Governor Asa Hutchinson.

Working with our existing industries to help ensure their success in Jonesboro is a priority and part of our strategic plan. Communication is key and is managed through several formats such as the **Plant Managers' Roundtable**, the **Existing Industry Association's Tour & Topic**, and an **industrial Rail Users' meeting**. A "Grow your Exports" seminar was held for industries in September and the need for **warehousing space** was assessed in 2019.

## MARKETING & PROMOTION

Recruiting talent and uncovering the gem of Jonesboro to the world is an intentional objective in Jonesboro's economic development strategic plan. The "Jonesboro - Now you Know" community video debuted in 2019 and has had 51,000 views to date ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJULcvY\\_hqc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJULcvY_hqc)) worldwide. Jonesboro Unlimited designed a **printed companion piece** for our existing companies to use as a recruiting tool. The publication can be edited by each company to fit their recruiting needs. The Council for Community and Economic Research's **Cost of Living Index** (<http://jonesborounlimited.com/data-center/cost-living>) has been added to the Jonesboro Unlimited website. The Index can be used as a recruitment tool, providing a salary comparison from their location to Jonesboro and a detailed breakdown of the cost components. Our economic development partners continue to promote Jonesboro through a wide variety of platforms, including but not limited to social media.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Jonesboro's workforce development program extends from working with elementary aged children to adults in the workplace. Developing the pipeline of talent begins in our schools with programs such as **TekStarz Summer Manufacturing Camp**, for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders; **ASUN's Manufacturing Day** for high school students and annual **Weld-A-Thon**; the **Teacher Externship Program**, where teachers work and learn in a manufacturing environment for three days; **Student Recognition** for elementary school children who overcome challenges; the **Arkansas Scholars program**, encouraging kids to maintain standards throughout their high school career; and building leaders through the **Jr. Leadership program** for 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Our economic development partners attend career fairs and work to maintain Craighead County's **ACT Work Ready Certification** status (<https://www.workreadycommunities.org/AR/031>). Our economic development groups partner with Arkansas State University in the "Growing Talent Together" program, partnering educators with industry to foster the development of skills for graduates needed by industry. "Get to Know Jonesboro," is a recruiting tool designed to introduce manufacturing professionals who are new to our community to Jonesboro and to provide a network venue for them with their peers.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Facilitating connections is a crucial component of successful growth for our city. Relationships are maintained with organizations such as the **Arkansas Economic Development Commission**, the **Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce**, and many **regional and national economic development organizations**. In addition, **Arkansas State University** and Jonesboro Unlimited are collaborating with **Dr. Bhattacharyya, the A-State Dean for the College of Engineering and Computer Science**, to continue to grow a pipeline of computer science and engineering graduates with the skills needed by our industries.

On a federal level, meetings were held in 2019 with **Senator John Boozman and Senator Tom Cotton, and Congressman Rick Crawford**. **Governor Asa Hutchinson** was actively involved in industrial projects and the **Arkansas State Chamber** kept us abreast of statewide initiatives.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Jonesboro's industrial parks are second to none when providing shovel ready sites for companies looking at our city. The essential infrastructure needed by companies requires much planning and is an ever-evolving effort. In 2019, the City of Jonesboro was awarded a **\$2.335 million federal rail grant** to build rail storage track to serve the Jonesboro Industrial Park and the Craighead Technology Park, and to move a rail switch near Commerce Road. This grant will be matched by funds from the City of Jonesboro and the Jonesboro Economic Development Corporation. **City Water & Light (CWL)** enhanced the **electric utility infrastructure** in the Craighead Technology Park with poles designed to withstand hurricane-strength winds. In addition, work started on the relocation of a ditch that bisects a premier site in the Craighead Technology Park. This relocation will help in making the site shovel ready. Transportation infrastructure is being enhanced by the **East Arkansas Good Roads Association**, as they work with the **Arkansas Highway Commission** and our **federal delegation** to further the **I-57 Interstate project**.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Jonesboro Unlimited announced **961 new jobs created and a capital investment of \$275.3 million in 2019**, by our target industry sectors (agricultural, healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, and professional). There were **25 Inquiries, 10 Prospect Visits, 43 Market Research Requests, and 36 Business Retention and Expansion activities**. The Jonesboro MSA had the **largest percentage of year-over-year job growth in the state at 3.94%**. Our labor force grew by 2,317 people at 66,106. The MSA employed 2,422 more people in in 2019, at 63,844 in January; unemployment was at 3.4% in January, down from January of 2019 at 3.7%.