

NORTHEAST ARKANSAS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Annual Report 2020

2020 was a year that will be remembered by all in Jonesboro. With the devastating tornado in March and the COVID-19 pandemic, many families and businesses searched to find new ways to engage and persevere. Jonesboro has always been a community of people who band together and overcome obstacles in times of need. And we did. As you will see in the annual review below, we persevered and had many good expansions and growth announcements. Thank you for your continued support. We are looking forward to a great 2021, as our city continues to evolve and grow in excellence.

Sincerely,
Al M. Heringer III, Chairman

BUSINESS ATTRACTION, RETENTION & EXPANSION

Jonesboro experienced **58 inquiries** during 2020, the highest number in the last 15 years. Inquiries came in the form of searches for existing buildings, site location consultants searching sites for their clients, or companies conducting a self-search for an expansion or relocation. The inquiries led to **4 site visits**, one of which was virtual.

There were **52 business retention and expansion activities** in 2020. Our existing industries, many of which are considered essential services, persevered through the challenges and, as you will see in this report, expanded and created new jobs.

Many times, our existing industries compete within their corporation for expansion projects in a process similar to locating a new industry. We are pleased that Jonesboro was selected by several corporate headquarters to expand and grow their Jonesboro facilities in 2020.

Jonesboro's industrial family is strong and committed to providing high-quality jobs to their team members and producing an excellent product that is shipped to consumers across the nation and world.

There were **48 market research requests** in 2020. Market research requests come many times from retail establishments, restaurants, or local companies looking to expand. Customized demographic data is provided based on the information needed.



Camfil APC announced in October they will build a new manufacturing facility in the Craighead Technology Park, to replace their facility that was destroyed by the tornado in March. Plans are to construct a 300,000 square foot facility and to be in production by early 2022. Camfil manufactures air filtration equipment and currently employs 245 in Jonesboro.

Colson plans to make a \$20 million investment in Jonesboro to construct a 147,000 square foot facility on 25 acres in the Craighead Technology Park. Colson manufactures casters in Jonesboro and employs 90 people.





In December, Nestlé unveiled that they will invest more than \$100 million to expand their Jonesboro facility to include a new line to produce Hot Pockets® brand sandwiches. At least 100 new employees will be hired over a two-year period for this expansion. Construction will involve renovating space and the addition of 90,000 square feet.

In November, Nice-Pak announced plans to expand manufacturing capacity at their Jonesboro facility and increasing employment by 300 by the end of 2021. The expansion will more than double their capacity to produce disinfecting wipes and increase capacity for other product groups.



Ritter Communications opened their new \$8 million multi-user data and cloud storage facility in Northeast Arkansas in November. This facility is the first service provider-grade data center to serve our regional businesses and is the only one of its kind within a 100-mile radius. The 8,544 square foot facility provides business customers with a highly secure, offsite location to store data and IT infrastructure. It is a great economic development asset for our region.

City Water and Light announced plans to build a 13.25 megawatt solar farm on 98-acres in the Craighead Technology Park, as part of a process to replace coal as an energy source. It is planned that this project will produce emissions-free sustainable energy over the expected 30-year life and longer. Manufacturers are embracing renewable energy and having the solar farm in the Craighead Technology Park is a definite asset.



Delta Peanut, who constructed a peanut shelling facility in Jonesboro in 2019, finished up their first full peanut harvest in 2020. The shelling facility has a capacity upwards of 180,000 tons, which is about twice the anticipated capacity of the state's current peanut crop.

Annual Inventory of Growth

Jonesboro Unlimited recently completed their Annual Inventory of New and Expanded Industries for 2020. The survey is sent to five targeted industry sectors – Agriculture, Healthcare, Logistics, Manufacturing, and Professional Services. In the midst of a most challenging year, Jonesboro's strength and economic diversity was highlighted, with results of the survey showing the creation of:

842 Net New Jobs and \$87.3 Million in Capital Investments made in 2020

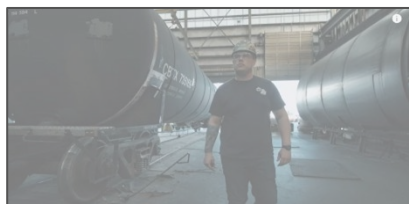
Many of our manufacturers are considered essential companies and have continued to work during the COVID pandemic. Two **Plant Managers' Roundtable** discussions were held in 2020, to provide them a forum to share information and talk about items of interest to them.

The **NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University** graduated their first class in 2020. The economic impact of having NYIT in Jonesboro is immense and elevates the healthcare sector of our economy for years to come.

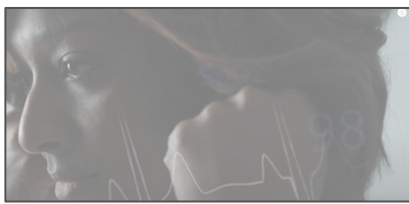
MARKETING & PROMOTION

Showcasing Jonesboro to prospective companies took on a new look in 2020, with technology coming to the forefront. As travel was curtailed by the pandemic, virtual site visits by consultants and companies were held. Potential sites were shown using drone footage as we quickly adapted to marketing Jonesboro electronically. As travel restrictions change and clients can visit in-person again, we feel a combination of the two methods will be utilized in the future.

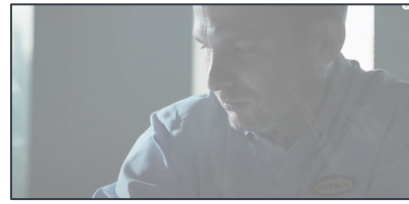
The "**Jonesboro – Here and Invested Series,**" was created to highlight professionals living and working in Jonesboro. Our city is a great location in which to build your career and is second to none in quality of place. Click on each picture below to watch the videos or go to YouTube – Jonesboro: Here and Invested.



Ryan Miller, Welding Supervisor
TrinityRail



Dr. Brook Laurent, Clinical Medicine
NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine



Ben Moyer, Director of Engineering
Hytrol Conveyor



Need Now, was created to provide essential information to businesses about PPP loans, unemployment, and services available.

Throughout the early days of the pandemic a series called **Compass, the Direction you**

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Our economic development partners, the City of Jonesboro and Jonesboro Unlimited developed a marketing campaign called "Mask-Up Jonesboro" to educate and encourage everyone to mask-up, social distance, and wash hands frequently. Individuals, industries, businesses, and A-State participated in the video, which can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvMIwsJGI04>

RELATIONSHIPS

Arkansas State University is a key component of Jonesboro's economic development success. Working with the College of Engineering and Computer Science, a stakeholders meeting was held with manufacturers in the region to discuss engineering needs among our industries.

Regional Coalition – The **Northeast Arkansas Economic Development Coalition (NEAEDC)** continued to meet in 2020 and worked to develop a new strategic plan for the promotion and development of the region. The NEAEDC is made up of Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Poinsett, and Randolph Counties. Mike Philpot, former Vice President of Economic Development, was President of the organization.

Statewide Representation – Jonesboro's economic development partners serve on many regional and statewide organizations that create policy and lead the state in promoting economic prosperity. Mark Young, President of Jonesboro Unlimited and the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce, continued to serve on the **Governor's Economic Recovery Task Force**, making recommendations on how to safely re-open Arkansas' economy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He also serves on the **Arkansas Economic Development Foundation**, and the **Arkansas Association of Asian Businesses**.

National and International Presence – Economic development consultants bring a majority of projects to communities and building relationships with those consultants is an important step in marketing our city on a national and global level. Jonesboro hosted a community visit with a nationally known food processing consultant in 2020, and participated in several virtual consultant connect events.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Providing first class infrastructure for our manufacturers to get their raw products in and finished goods out is vital to their success in Jonesboro. Many infrastructure improvement projects were started in 2020 that will provide superior service to facilities in our industrial parks.

A **rail storage yard** will be constructed near the Craighead Technology Park to add rail car storage capability for our industries. The site will hold up to 120 additional cars. The Jonesboro Economic Development Corporation (JEDC), in collaboration with the City of Jonesboro, purchased a 9 +- acre site for the project near the Craighead Technology Park. Construction will start this year on the project.

In addition, the **rail spur terminus** in the Craighead Technology Park has been extended 1,200 feet, taking it to the southern border of the Delta Peanut site. This extension serves Delta Peanut and will be available to serve companies locating south of their site.

The East Arkansas Good Roads Association continues to work on highway projects that impact the economic development of our region. The **Future I-57 project** is a long-term project of the organization. The route will start in North Little Rock at I-30 and end in Chicago. Our state and federal agencies and legislators are moving forward with this project in partnership with Missouri officials.

The **Jonesboro Municipal Airport** was demolished in the March tornado. While the airport was fully operational after only a few days, the Airport Commission spent most of 2020 rebuilding hangars and facilities. The runway strengthening project is still a high priority and will hopefully be fully funded soon.

Voters in the State of Arkansas passed Highway Issue 1 in 2020, permanently putting in place the one-half cent sales tax for highways. This provides permanent funding for the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

THE NUMBERS

The Milken Institute ranks communities annually on economic performance. The Index includes jobs, wages, and high-tech growth, while also measuring housing affordability and broadband access. The 2021

rankings list **Jonesboro as the 14th Best Performing Small City!** This includes a ranking of 7th among peer communities in 12-month job growth. A total of 201 small cities were included in the rankings.



MILKEN INSTITUTE

Jonesboro's low cost of living allows your dollar to go farther here! See the comparison below, with the national average being 100.0. Source: C2ER Cost of Living index; 2020 Annual Average Data.

