



Alma celebrated the unveiling of its Kick Start Alma Action Plan on May 7.

## Kick Start Alma kicks off

By Moriah Bruner

**O**n May 7 the City of Alma unveiled its Kick Start Alma Action Plan, a strategic blueprint for the growth and development of Alma over the next five years focused on the following four priorities: culture, recreation, and beautification; branding and marketing; downtown revitalization; and job creation.

Alma Mayor and Kick Start Alma Executive Team Co-Chair Keith Greene and Gov. Asa Hutchinson were on hand to celebrate this important milestone and mark the beginning of the implementation phase of the planning process.

“Kick Start Alma means a great deal to me and this city,” Greene said. “It was about bringing the citizens of Alma together to share their ideas and vision for the city and establish goals to pursue. We’re looking forward to moving forward with our plan for the future of Alma.”

The first key breakthrough, or strategic opportunity, identified in the action plan focuses on enhancing the attractiveness of Alma through beautification efforts, attracting residents and tourists with public festivals and events, and establishing a new branch of the Crawford County Library system in the downtown district, possibly to include a historic museum.

Developing a consistent community brand and robust online presence will help Alma achieve their second goal of ensuring the city is presenting a unique and compelling marketing narrative to the world.

“We want to show the world how wonderful Alma is, for residents, visitors, and businesses alike,” Greene said.

Downtown revitalization is another key breakthrough. Priorities include connecting the downtown district to I-40 and I-49 to entice tourists to visit the downtown area, revamping building codes and ordinances to enhance property values, public safety and

development, and building a plaza for hosting public activities and events that will draw artists, musicians, food trucks, and citizens to the downtown area.

Hutchinson called community leaders, the citizens of Alma, and stakeholders to support the capacity for economic development in Alma, which is another top priority area identified in the plan.

“Alma is in the heart of everything going on in Northwest Arkansas,” he said. “So get ready, get your boots on, and get ready to work because Alma is a key part of the future of economic development in Arkansas.”

Opportunities to support this effort include establishing the Chamber of Commerce director position as a full-time role; the creation of a business retention and expansion program; developing and implementing a long-term infrastructure, land use, and utility master plan that will guide future growth and development; and creating a small business incubator and maker space, in conjunction with other entrepreneurship programming.

The Kick Start Alma Action Plan is truly a collaborative effort. Guided by the University of Central Arkansas’s Community Development Institute (CDI) and Dr. Mark Peterson at University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX), the planning process began in August 2017 when a group of trained community and economic development professionals in CDI’s Advanced Year Class completed a high-level assessment of the community.

Following the assessment phase, the project partners and community began a period of extensive public engagement, including a community-wide survey and monthly public meetings. An executive committee and action teams were formed to guide the process, develop a vision statement, and articulate goals for Alma. The



Alma will have a key part to play in Arkansas's economic future, Gov. Hutchinson said.

Kick Start team included representatives from the City of Alma, Alma Area Chamber of Commerce, Alma School District, Western Arkansas Planning and Development District, the Crawford County Cooperative Extension Service, churches and nonprofits, business owners, local banks, and many other community leaders and citizens.

The Community Development Kick Start program was created in 2014 to provide a unique opportunity for CDI graduates to apply their knowledge and skills to a real-life situation and to kick start a community and economic development process in one community. Previous Kick Start communities include Paris (2014), Heber Springs (2015), and Lonoke (2016). The city of Sheridan has been selected for Kick Start 2018 and the assessment process will begin in early August when the Advanced Year Class convenes during the 32nd Annual CDI at the University of Central Arkansas.



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