



Paris makes headway on action plan

By Shelby Fiegel and Brittany Lutz

In August of 2014, the City of Paris decided that it was time to start taking the future into their own hands. To begin this process, Paris enlisted the help of the University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Through a six-month period of brainstorming, research and communication the community created the Paris Action Plan, a 10-year blueprint for growth and development of the city.

The Paris Action Plan identifies three areas of focus for the city that serve as a foundation for all of the short and long-term goals outlined within the plan:

- Education, workforce development, and jobs
- Quality of life, quality of place, and youth activities
- Tourism, marketing, branding, and downtown development

Nearly a half a decade has passed since the creation of the Paris Action Plan and the city is on track to successfully implement the plan. Paris community leaders Tonya Baumgartner, Paris Area Chamber of Commerce director and city council member, and Dr. Lee Lane, chair of the Logan County Industrial Development Corporation, recently reviewed the Action Plan to determine which goals have already been completed, are in progress, or have not been started or are no longer applicable. Out of the 87 goals outlined in the plan, 18 (approximately 22 percent) were completed, 56 (approximately 64 percent) are currently in progress, and 12 (approximately 14 percent) have not been started or are no longer applicable goals.



With nearly 86 percent of the Paris Action Plan goals either completed or in progress, Paris has become an emerging community in the state of Arkansas. Many peer communities of Paris now look to them as a guide in their development efforts. Some of the major accomplishments Paris has achieved include:

Tyson Foods Logan County Career Center—“We recognized workforce is the top priority for any community wanting students to move ahead in the future,” Baumgartner said. “We completed the Tyson Foods Logan County Career Center last year with classes in adult education, allied health, industrial technology, and welding.” With a \$1.3 million investment from partners such as Tyson Foods, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Arkansas Tech University–Ozark, local business owners, and others, Paris opened the Tyson Foods Logan County Career Center in January 2018. Close to 60 students are currently enrolled in the Career Center. Paris has also caught the eye of an international investor. Hengtong, a Chinese technology company, is considering setting up their first American plant in the community.

Arkansas Downtown Network—The Paris Action Plan made it possible for downtown advocates and other community leaders to implement a coordinated plan of action for a more vibrant downtown through beautification efforts, signage, renovation, and restoration of building facades, and the recruitment of new businesses and shops. Because of these efforts, Paris was selected as an Arkansas Downtown Network community and was named a 2017 Tourism Trendsetter City. Baumgartner said, “The process of creating the Paris Action Plan encouraged us to join the Main Street Arkansas program, which has brought grant money to assist our businesses and many business facades have been restored to their original beauty.”

Branding and Marketing—Not only is Paris now home to the only Eiffel Tower in the state (which can be seen at Eiffel Tower Park in downtown Paris), but the city is focused on becoming a tourism hub. The Paris Area Chamber is creating a tourism video that will include 10 points of interest in the area, one of which is Mt. Magazine. There are also plans to increase awareness of Paris as a tourist destination by including more flyers in visitor centers and other chambers across the state. Tour de Paire, a new biking event whose route runs from Paris to Mt. Magazine Lodge, will also be featured in *Bike AR* magazine.

“I am proud of the work we have accomplished through the Paris Action Plan,” Baumgartner said. “We have checked off most of our top priorities in a few short years. I have held eight ribbon cuttings in three years and we have three more scheduled this year just in our downtown, which was a top priority. The Paris Action Plan

has helped pull a large group of volunteers together with a common vision and love for their community for the betterment of the community. I was new in my position when we started this process and it gave me the traction I needed to get our community behind a common vision!”


Ever since the adoption of the Paris Action Plan, the city has been tirelessly working to change their community for the better. Community leaders recognize that community development and economic development are two sides of the same coin. Without one, the other cannot live prosperously. Paris is on the fast track to success, and it will certainly be interesting to see where they are five more years down the road.



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“The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.”
— Goethe

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