

Lonoke prepares to Kick Start development efforts

By Sara Roberts

Community leaders in the city of Lonoke are preparing for an exciting journey over the next nine months as the city partners with the University of Central Arkansas's Community Development Institute (CDI) to create a strategic blueprint for its future.

Only 22 miles east of Little Rock, Lonoke is closely linked with central Arkansas region, though its agricultural base gives it strong ties to east Arkansas and the Delta. In June, Lonoke was selected as CDI's 2016 Community Development Kick Start community. During the first week of August, the CDI Advanced Year class, a group of experienced community and economic development practitioners, will conduct a high level assessment of Lonoke and provide local leaders with their first impressions and insights on growth opportunities. This will be accomplished through a driving tour, online research, data mining, and local interviews.

Lonoke competed against several other cities for this opportunity. The community's sense of urgency, passion, and broad base of support signaled that the area was ready and willing to plan for the future. Lonoke Mayor Wayne McGee said, "I feel honored that Lonoke was selected for the 2016 Community Development Institute's Community Development Kick Start program. Being selected will allow the city of Lonoke to get a fresh perspective on how to make our community grow economically and be a better place to live, as well as making the most of the assets that are currently in place. This will also allow our businesses and citizens to provide input on things that they would like to see in our town. I know that this program will help to give us the insight needed to move Lonoke forward."

Following the CDI Advanced Year experience, the University of Central Arkansas and University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service will work with Lonoke for an additional nine months. During that time, the community will meet monthly to identify key issues and opportunities, culminating in the unveiling of a five-year strategic action plan in May 2017.

"The word 'hope' is so appropriate for Lonoke, because we are a very hopeful community, and one in which there is a climate of unity and connection. Moving forward, as our community stakeholders undertake initiatives with an emphasis on residential, retail, industrial and downtown development, we anticipate that the CDI strategic plan will serve as a capable road map and tool for casting vision and building consensus," said Ryan Biles, Architect/Lonoke Advanced Year Committee Leader.

Past cities selected for the Community Kick Start program include Heber Springs and Paris, chosen in 2015 and 2014 respectively. Both are still working toward goals and initiatives that were identified during the program.

The Community Development Institute, established in 1987 at the University of Central Arkansas, trains community and economic development professionals from Arkansas and surrounding states. The complete CDI experience is a three-year training program, with one week of training per year. Participants are exposed to a comprehensive, applied approach to the field of community and economic development. The Advanced Year cohort is a unique group of graduates from the CDI program who are ready to put their classroom experience to work in the real world.

The Community Kick Start program is offered free of charge to one community each year, and represents a unique partnership between two institutions of higher education. For more information on the CDI Advanced Year program, visit uca.edu/cdi/advanced-year.



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