



Kick Start Heber Springs  *Action Plan: A Blueprint for the Future*



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Executive Summary

This document, the Heber Springs Action Plan, is a strategic blueprint for the growth and development of Heber Springs, Arkansas over the next five years. The Action Plan was created as a result of public forums and action teams working together over the past nine months to identify a vision and goals for the community, as well as some promising long term strategic opportunities.

Many people and organizations worked together on this effort, including representatives from the City of Heber Springs, Heber Springs Area Chamber of Commerce, Heber Springs School District, Arkansas State University at Heber Springs, Sugarloaf Heritage Council, Downtown Heber Springs, Greers Ferry Lake Trails Council, Greers Ferry Lake and Little Red River Association, Cleburne County, business owners, local banks, and many other community leaders and citizens. To craft this document, the community worked with the University of Central Arkansas' Community Development Institute and the Breakthrough Solutions program at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension.

The interaction between the universities and the community began in August 2015, when a group of community and economic development professionals visited Heber Springs to assess the community's current situation and help them identify breakthroughs to move the community forward. As a result of that session, and monthly meetings since that time, priority areas and several breakthroughs have been identified as part of this process. A summary of these key breakthroughs are identified in the next section. The priority areas identified were: Branding & Marketing, Economic Development, Education & Workforce, Quality of Life & Place, Tourism, and Funding & Finance. Many projects are already underway, and many others are planned and outlined in this document. Community and economic development is a long term effort that can take many years to bear fruit. The Heber Springs Action Plan lays the groundwork for those efforts and helps focus the enthusiasm and passion that the Heber Springs citizens have exhibited throughout the planning process.



Heber Springs Early Successes



photo by: Arlene Anderson

Early successes that have taken place since the planning process was initiated include:

- The Heber Springs Area Chamber of Commerce realized a need to have a more visible presence downtown. By initiating this conversation during the planning process, First Security Bank of Heber Springs saw an opportunity to make this dream a reality. First Security is constructing a new building, and will lease their old building, which is located downtown, to the Chamber of Commerce.
- The Chamber of Commerce also realized that there was an opportunity to fund local development projects, but a clear organization to manage and distribute funds needed to be created. The Chamber is now in the process of creating a foundation to serve this need.
- The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department awarded \$180,000 for a sidewalk project and Greers Ferry Lake trail extension, providing a shot in the arm for these efforts.
- The Chamber has partnered with a local high school technology class, known as an EAST Lab, to produce a video highlighting the migratory birds that make Greers Ferry Lake their home during part of the winter, with a long term goal of creating a YouTube channel to house additional videos.
- The Cleburne County Quorum Court leased the historical old Post Office building in downtown Heber Springs to the Cleburne County Historical Society, providing them a highly visible location as a tourist attraction.

Community Breakthroughs

In times of rapid change, successful communities create breakthroughs to move forward toward their desired future. Congratulations to the community leaders and citizens of Heber Springs who have developed these breakthroughs and breakthrough solutions:

Breakthrough - Community Identity and Brand

Heber Springs will develop a powerful community identity and brand that differentiates Heber Springs as a unique, vibrant community and attracts tourists, retirees, families, and businesses from all over the nation.

Breakthrough – Robust Economic Development Program

Heber Springs will develop a robust economic development program with an economic development point person for the city, clear roles and ongoing communication with key stakeholders, and a strong emphasis on supporting and expanding existing employers.

Breakthrough – Education and Workforce Consortium

Heber Springs will develop an education – workforce consortium that creates a thriving professional development program for local business, industry, and entrepreneurs, promotes improved retention and performance of existing employees, and creates an environment that attracts new business and industry to the area.

Breakthrough – A Progressive Master Plan for a Vibrant, Walkable, and Beautiful Community

Building on planning work already done within the community, Heber Springs will involve local government, businesses, organizations, and citizens to create a progressive master plan that will promote not only beautification, walkability, transportation alternatives, bicycle friendliness, fitness, and economy but also a cohesive identity with historic, natural, environmental and artistic qualities.

Breakthrough- Heber Springs Will Become a Year-Round Tourism Destination

By creating multiple activities and venues for tourism and cultural activities in the off season, community leaders in Heber Springs will transform Heber Springs into a year-round tourism destination.

Breakthrough - Long-Term Sustainability through New Funding and Finance

Heber Springs will create a Heber Springs Funding Advisory Team, that is familiar with multiple funding sources and strategies, and helps Kick Start Heber Springs action teams and other organizations develop community and financial support for priority projects.

Vision Statement

Our Vision for Heber Springs in 5 to 10 Years: It is the year 2025, and Heber Springs has become nationally known for:

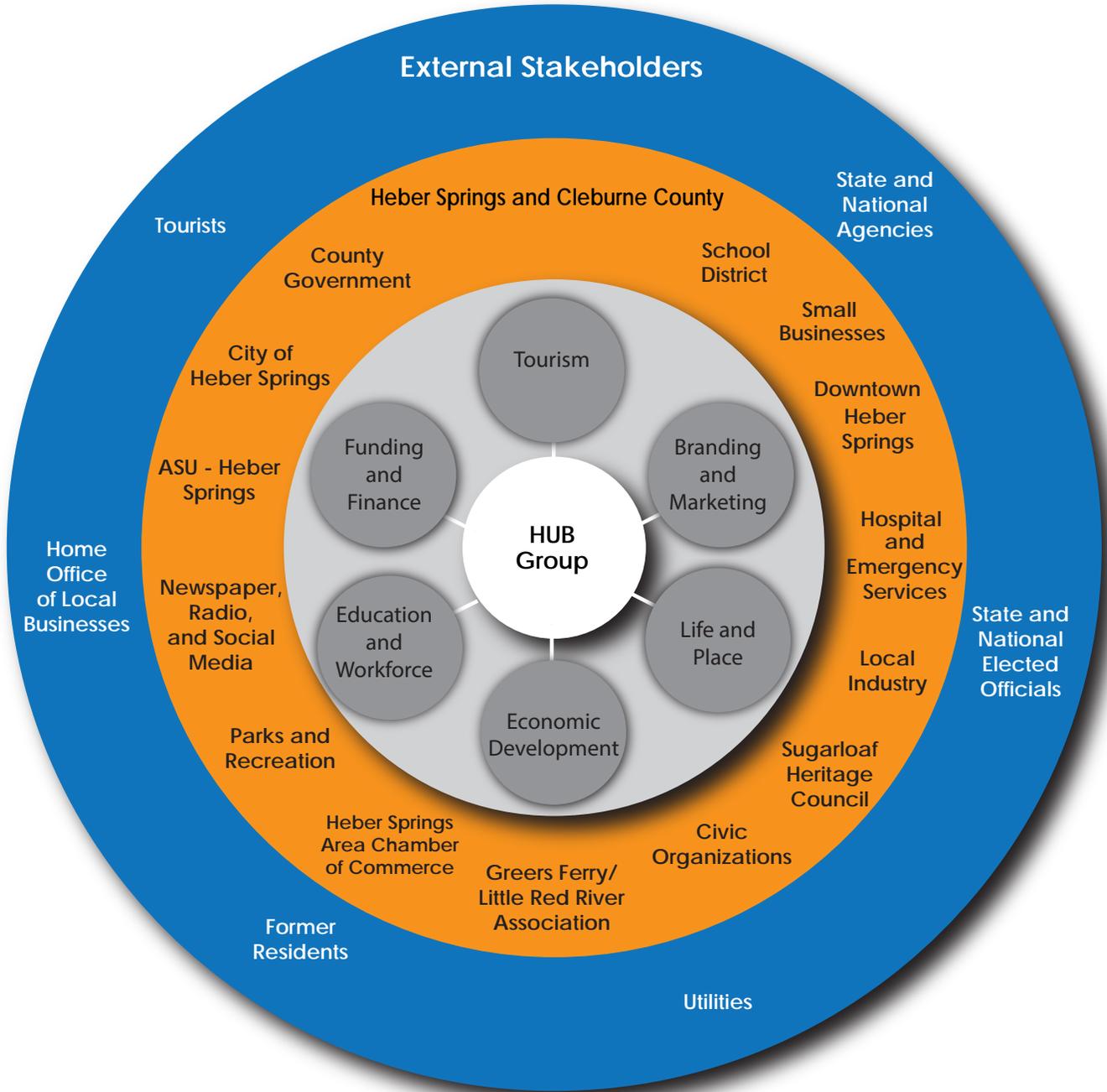
- A sense of wonder with its natural beauty, lake, river, and community activities that attracts visitors, businesses, and retirees all seasons of the year,
- A walkable, bike-friendly trail system that connects downtown Heber Springs with Greers Ferry Lake and the Little Red River,
- A vibrant downtown that offers retail opportunities and activities for residents and tourists alike,
- Diverse job opportunities and a strong support system for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and major employers,
- Excellent schools, college campus offerings, and health care,
- A sense of adventure expressed in hiking Sugarloaf Mountain, kayaking on the river, or cliff jumping into the lake at Dam Site Park,
- A strong sense of community, with citizens and leaders committed to creating a healthy, sustainable future for the next generation.

Core Values

- To foster long term vision and short-term action
- To generate excitement, energy, and action
- To create an ongoing development process that continues as new opportunities emerge



Kick Start Heber Springs Stakeholder Analysis and Organizational Structure





Branding & Marketing

Action Team Members

- Amy Baeder, Baeder Consulting/Educurious – Chair
- Kathy Brown, Ozark Country Market
- Kevin Clairday, Clairday Electric Inc.
- Pia Clairday
- Patty Cox, Greers Ferry Lake and Trails Council
- Rebekah Hall, Office of Senator Tom Cotton
- Ellen Hobgood, Ellen Hobgood Gallery & Associates
- Julie Murray, Heber Springs Area Chamber of Commerce
- Michael Wagner, Greers Ferry Lake and Trails Council

Working Well

- The Chamber of Commerce and outreach efforts; including newsletters and other communication initiatives
- Natural amenities: lake, parks, trails, river, wildlife
- Medical amenities; Heber Springs is a good place for seniors
- Arkansas State University and a great public school system
- Health and wellness opportunities
- Growing Main Street

Challenges

- Training in branding and marketing
- Presence on Yelp! and Trip Advisor
- Getting the community to work together and to set similar goals
- Communication between key groups and stakeholders
- Communication pathways; such as online marketing materials, brochures, etc.
- Promoting new tech
- Advertisements on state wide level
- Dissemination of information
- Year-round marketing plan



Assets and Opportunities

- Chamber of Commerce
- Creating consistent communication pathways and outreaching to key target markets
- Natural amenities; lake, parks, trails, river, wildlife
- Medical amenities; good place for seniors
- ASU/school system
- Health and wellness opportunities
- Growing Main Street
- History of Heber
- Stories from older generation
- Springs and Spring park
- Mike Disfarmer (the famous photographer)

Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Select a compelling brand, logo, and tagline for Heber Springs, describe the brand promise, work with the community to deliver on the brand promise in all aspects of the community, and communicate this to the world through co-branding with existing websites and other means.

- Complete logos for city, parks and recreation, and chamber
- Integrate logo into website
- Update website with logo
- Communicate with businesses to align brand promise

Goal 2: Create a campaign to promote business listings on Google maps and other travel websites, with 30 additional businesses taking advantage of these online marketing tools.

- Identify members who need to add/claim Google listings
- Add new businesses to Google Business

- Add other online listings (TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.)

Goal 3: Create and promote a Heber Springs YouTube channel, generate at least five videos to upload to the channel every year, and link the channel to Heber Springs' websites.

- EAST students from Heber Springs High School will identify a picture for the cover page of the YouTube channel
- EAST students will take pictures and video at the Heber Area Springs Chamber of Commerce Banquet
- EAST students will take pictures and video at Springfest in April 2016
- Within six months, primary portal websites will have links to the Heber Springs YouTube channel
- Addition of videos and maintenance of channel
- Promotion of YouTube Channel

Goal 4: Continue quarterly meetings of A&P/Downtown Heber Springs /Judge /Mayor / Chamber as a means to enhance communication, work on joint projects, and bring in resource persons who may be helpful.

- Quarterly leadership meeting to align goals and enhance communication
- As needed, get new ideas and feedback from outside stakeholders

Goal 5: Offer businesses trainings regarding effective marketing and social media use.

- Training on online marketing and social media was offered March 10
- Additional trainings will be offered in the future, possibly in conjunction with Arkansas State University- Heber Springs

Goal 6: After the brand logo and tagline are confirmed, complete a marketing audit of all websites, billboards, and hard copy materials to ensure that they are consistent with the Heber Springs brand.

- Complete marketing audit
- Make necessary changes
- Make updates as needed

Goal 7: Identify the most promising market segments for promoting tourism and enticing new residents, identify how to reach them and what they want, and take action to meet those needs and reach out to them.

- Research demographics and connect with local universities for assistance
- Research gaps and economic opportunities
- Make an action plan for researching our target demographics



Economic Development



Action Team Members

- Brett Graham, First Security Bank – Co-Chair
- Kendrick Ketchum, Progressive Waste – Co-Chair
- Howard Chapin, First Security Bank
- Mayor Jimmy Clark, City of Heber Springs
- Anthony Galloway, First Electric
- Jeff Lynch, Eagle Bank
- Keith McHan, First State Bank
- Kay Price, Arkansas Department of Workforce Services
- Todd Schroeder, FECC
- Mike Shook, AP Innovations
- Paula Sporn, ReMax
- Nick Williams, CWB Engineers, Inc.

Working Well

- Quality of life for young professionals
- Second home owners in Heber Springs
- Highway funding for downtown sidewalks

Challenges

- Financing
- Empty buildings
- Broadband connectivity

Assets and Opportunities

- Trails
- Facilities: fairgrounds, airport, hospital, corporate retreats, community center, ball parks, and library
- Facilities for corporate retreats
- Hospital
- Red Apple Inn/tourism
- Greers Ferry Lake and Little Red River
- Bike race
- Airport
- High quality of life and arts events
- Fairgrounds

Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Create a robust business retention and expansion program that identifies the workforce and other needs, challenges, and opportunities for our businesses, and assists them to address those needs and opportunities.

Goal 2: Create a comprehensive data base of commercial property listings and other data necessary for economic development, make it available on-line and in other venues as appropriate, and keep it updated.

Goal 3: Pull together key economic development stakeholders in the community and county, identify an economic development point person for the city, describe roles for each organization, establish a mechanism for ongoing communication, and increase the capacity of this group over time to develop the local economy.



Education & Workforce Development

Action Team Members

- Chris Boyett, Arkansas State University at Heber Springs – Chair
- Tommy Land, Republican Party
- Kay Price, Arkansas Department of Workforce Services
- Keith Slaten, Arkansas State University at Searcy
- Debbie Thompson, Arkansas State University at Heber Springs
- Tara Wild, Department of Workforce

Working Well

- Good community college - ASU (tech training programs)
- Good public school system
- The Chamber of Commerce offers training courses on various topics

Challenges

- There is a lack of communication between the schools and businesses concerning needs
- Lack of retention of workers and students
- Money for programming
- Lack of diverse and high skilled jobs



Assets and Opportunities

- Arkansas State University at Heber Springs
- School system
- Strong industry presence

Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Create a local education - workforce consortium of key stakeholders in education and workforce preparation that meet and communicate on a regular basis to ensure there is a continuous, vibrant selection of offerings for workforce development that meets the need of existing businesses, is responsive to changes and new opportunities, and supports entrepreneurship.

Goal 2: Create a biennial workforce/education summit in Heber Springs to create a forum for a larger array of stakeholders. This summit would serve several purposes:

- Provide feedback to local educational institutions about the quality of programs and need for of new programs,
- Provide feedback to local employers about the needs of educational institutions and opportunities for collaboration,
- Serve as a recruiting mechanism for businesses and industries to be part of the consortium, and
- Provide an opportunity for experts and officials from outside the community to share resources and insights about emerging trends and new opportunities.



Quality of Life & Place

Action Team Members

- Stan Lee, First National Bank – Co-Chair
- Frank Wimberley, Sulphur Creek Outfitters – Co-Chair
- Liz Blankenship, Southridge Village
- Mary-Margaret Couch, Downtown Heber Springs
- Lesa Jernigan, Heber Springs Mayor's Office
- Dwight Mckee
- Don Rodgers, Centennial Bank
- Cortney Singleton, Bottle Tree Gallery
- Bobby Walker, Heber Springs Police Department
- Paulette Yarbough

Working Well

- Facilities and organizations: ASU, hospital, library, community center, arts center, school system, and Farmers market at the new pavilion in Spring Park
- Low crime rate
- Churches (statistic) to low crime

Challenges

- Funding
- Lack of activities for youth; not enough things to do for young families
- Local support and funding

Assets and Opportunities

- Historical society
- Healthy business downtown
- Retail diversity and healthy business downtown
- Outdoor activities; utilize nature industry
- Keep businesses open
- Health care providers
- New Chamber / Welcome community: 501C3 status

photo by: CJRW



photo by: Frank Wimberley



photo by: Julie Murray

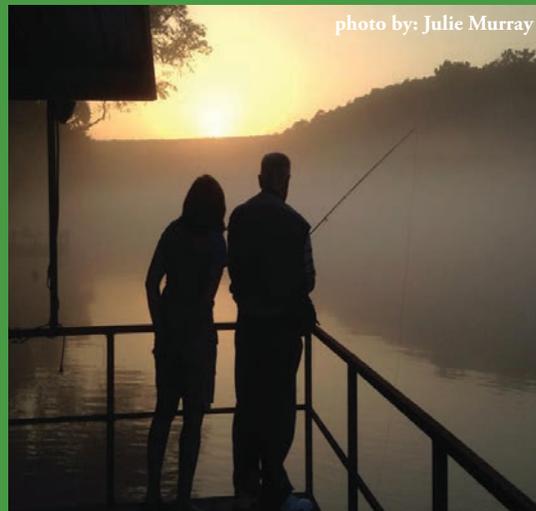
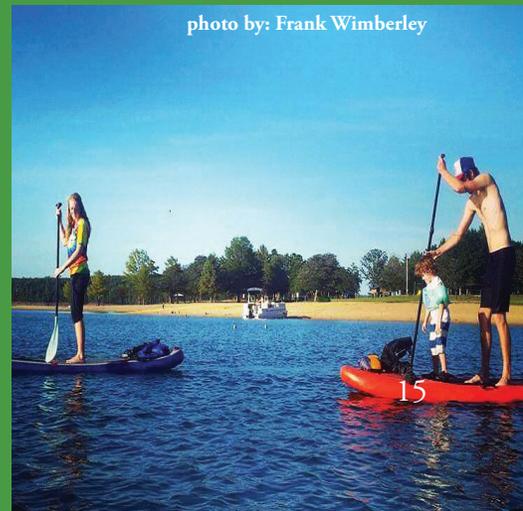


photo by: Frank Wimberley



Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Work directly with business owners, Heber Springs Planning and Zoning, Heber Springs City Council and other property owners along Highway 25 (South 7th Street), Main Street, and the new roundabout on Front Street to beautify and clean up these areas.

Goal 2: Work with business owners to create a consistent beautification look.

Goal 3: Improve the signage at all entrance points to Heber Springs. For instance, at top of the mountain entering on 25 from the South - the sign coming from Tumbling Shoals needs to be relocated.

Goal 4: Institute a program to beautify the city. This will encompass plantings, pole decorations, upgrades to buildings along the major thoroughfares, and other ventures.

Goal 5: Work in conjunction with the Trails council to coordinate our efforts with theirs and assist in their efforts.

Goal 6: Study the possibility of murals to be added to select buildings.

Goal 7: Create consistent signage in our town to further brand our community. We will use the new brand created by the city and the Chamber of Commerce.



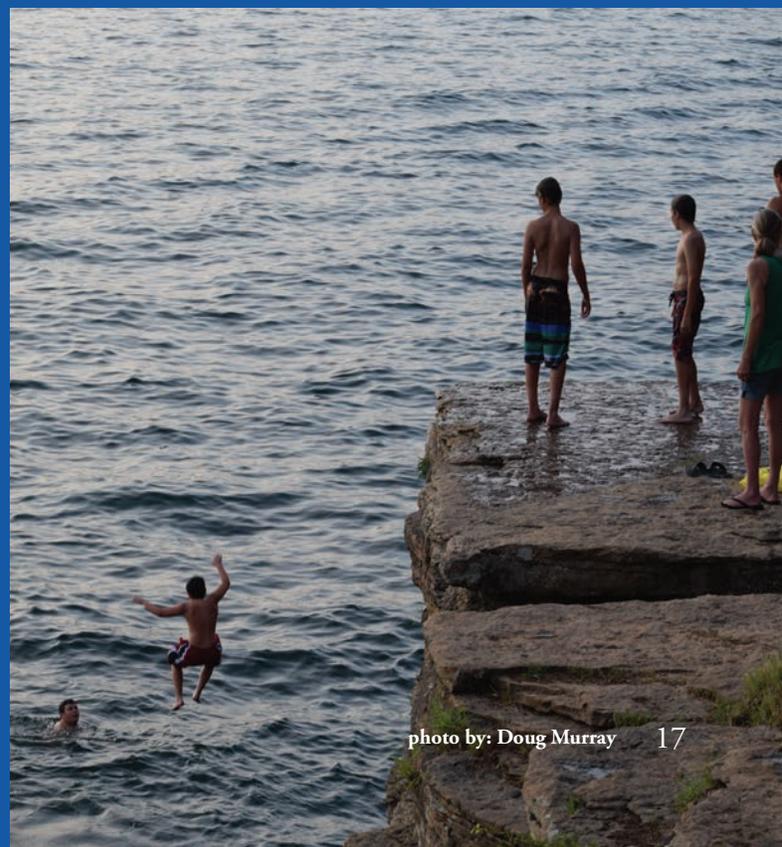
Tourism

Action Team Members

- Theresa Bobo, Heber Springs Area Chamber of Commerce – Co-Chair
- Whitney Vaughan, Holiday Inn Express – Co-Chair
- Charlotte Deckard
- Joseph Didden, Office of Congressman Rick Crawford
- Gale McRae, Greers Ferry Lake/ Little Red River Association
- Nicole Nash, Red Apple Inn
- Umang Patel, Conway Management/Lindsey's Resort
- Kristine Puckett, Arkansas Department of Tourism
- Benny Rorie, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Sherri Shoults, Greers Ferry National Fish Hatchery
- David Smith, Red Apple Inn
- Chris Stafiej, Chamber Ambassador
- Lindsey White, Lindsey's Resort

Working Well

- Greers Ferry Lake and Little Red River
- Variety of special events
- Welcoming to tourists - friendly people
- Hatchery/Corps Visitor Center
- Good airport
- Lake gets 7 million visitors a year



Challenges

- Downtown closes at 5 p.m.
- Stores may not open until 10 a.m. and downtown closes at 5 p.m.
- Restaurants closed Monday
- Need more opportunity for fine dining or non-fast food
- 5-9 month season needs to be strengthened
- Off- lake activities, room for improvement
- The wet/dry issue
- No wedding chapel
- Not enough hotel rooms
- There needs to be more social media promotion
- More public unification needed
- Hard to accommodate needs of large groups
- No shuttle - can't walk or ride bikes around town easily

Assests and Opportunities

- Natural opportunities: lake, river, fish hatchery, trails, and natural springs
- Recreational opportunities: community center, sports complex, golf course, and trails Golf course
- Safe community
- Residents can lead local tours
- Spring Park; opportunity to have farmers market and other events
- People are great; hospitality training
- Arkansas State University at Heber Springs; build tourism itineraries and tap into student creativity
- Opportunity to advertise train museum
- New Disc Golf course
- Performing Arts Theatre

Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Work with local organizations and businesses to create events and tourism packages that will draw people to our community in the fall and winter seasons including:

- Emphasis on biking – road and trails,
- Fall Shooting Tournament,
- Fall Outdoor Adventure Packages,
- Winter Tourism Packages, and a
- Fall and Winter Little Red River Fishing Tournament.



photo by: Frank Wimberley

Goal 2: Find or build an indoor venue and host family friendly entertainers to foster greater activity in the off peak season.

Funding & Finance

Action Team Members

- Clint Bell, CWB Engineers, Inc. – Co-Chair
- Rodney Watson, Long-Watson-Long Development, LLC – Co-Chair
- Steve Choate, Justice of the Peace Cleburne County
- Mayor Jimmy Clark, City of Heber Springs
- Chad Evans, Justice of the Peace Cleburne County
- Jerry Holmes, Cleburne County Judge
- Don Rodgers, Centennial Bank
- Willie Stone, Justice of the Peace Cleburne County

Working Well

- Chamber of Commerce is in the process of achieving 501(c)3 status, which could be used by different groups
- Recruiting businesses to donate \$100 a month for downtown revitalization
- The city is applying for grants for streets

Challenges

- Most people don't see the opportunity, are not aware, or engaged in funding and finance on the community level
- Citizens are not aware of the importance of funding and finance
- Citizens see funding and finance as too complicated

Assets and Opportunities

- A & P tax
- One cent sales tax for parks
- City and county government revenues
- Cleburne County Community Foundation
- JB Hunt started in Heber Springs
- Affluent citizens or residents with a vacation home in Heber Springs
- Lenders
- Future Group – pays \$100 a year and supports non-profits

Five Year Goals

Goal 1: Raise funds for city beautification to support projects such as beautifying Heber Springs Road/South Seventh Street.

Goal 2: Within 2 years, assess the A&P tax and evaluate options of extending the tax to additional businesses or geographic reaches.

Goal 3: Work as a liaison to coordinate between the various groups of the city, developing projects and bringing together the proper groups for completion such as Downtown Heber Springs, the Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society, and A&P Commission.

Goal 4: Work with local government (city and county) to evaluate budgets, coordinate spending efforts for maximum impact, and evaluate funding sources or additional revenue streams to fund projects.

Goal 5: Continue our efforts to secure grant funding for the community and enhance our efforts to learn and educate the public about grant opportunities through workshops, newsletters, and other means.

Goal 6: Increase fundraising efforts on all fronts by becoming a Heber Springs Funding Advisory Team, that is familiar with multiple funding sources and strategies, and helps Kickstart Heber Springs action teams develop community and financial support for priority projects.

Goal 7: Create a fundraising and community support effort for full funding of the existing trails project through the Greers Ferry Lake Trails Council – ten mile biking/walking/running trail.





CDI & U of A Cooperative Extension

The Community Development Institute Central (CDI), established in 1987 at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, trains community and economic development professionals in 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. CDI is relevant for both new and seasoned professionals because it focuses on best practices and current trends. CDI is coordinated by Director Amy Whitehead, Assistant Director Josh Markham, and Project Coordinator Shelby Fiegel.

The Community Development Kick Start program was created 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.

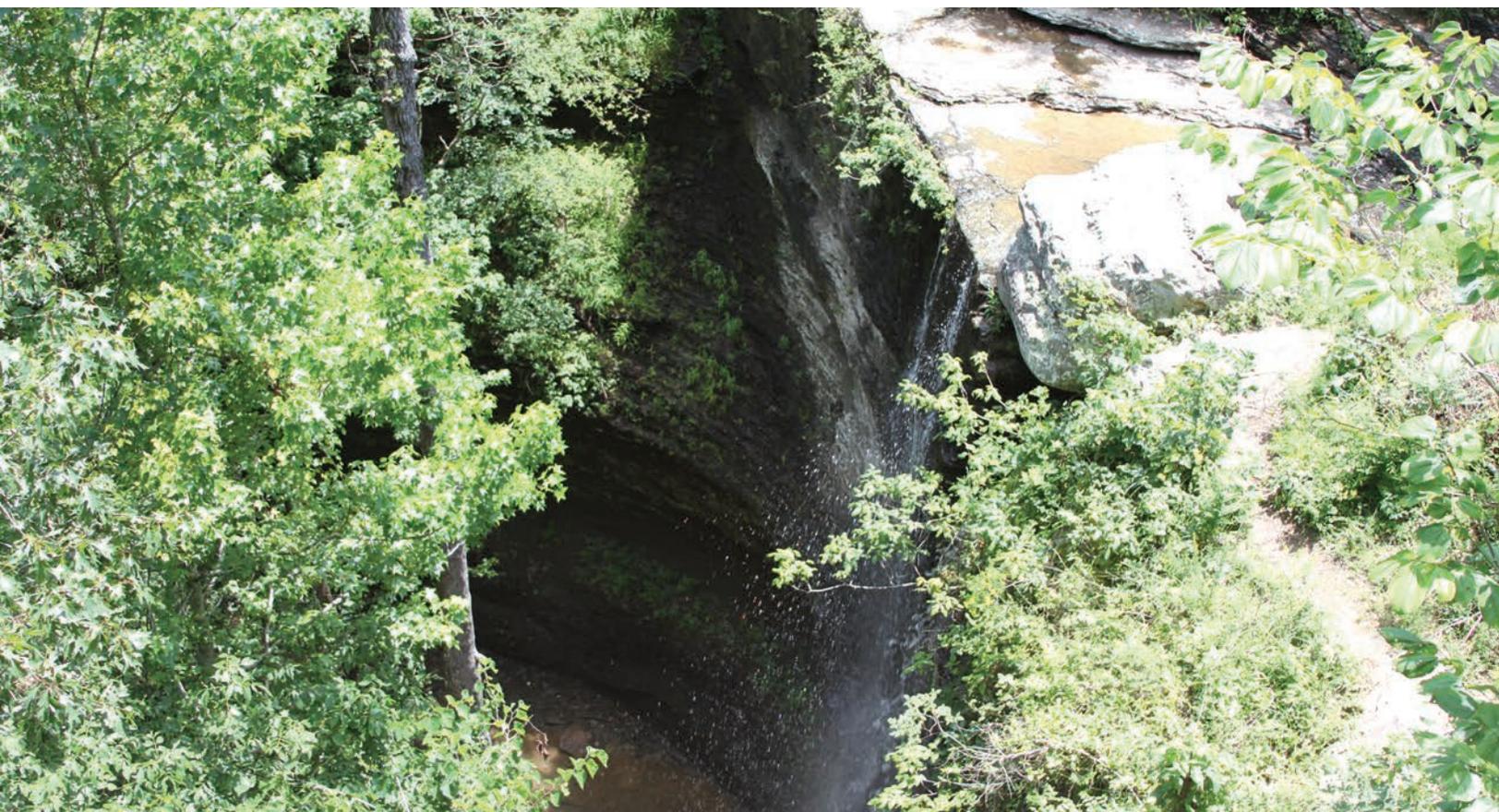
Community Development Kick Start uses the Breakthrough Solutions Model from the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, with Dr. Mark Peterson, professor of Community and Economic Development, serving as facilitator and partner for this initiative. The Breakthrough Solutions Program is a partnership initiative with the purpose of equipping communities and regions in Arkansas to be vibrant, sustainable, and resilient in this 21st century economy.

Communities in Arkansas were invited to apply for this unique opportunity, and Heber Springs was selected. Once the Heber Springs community was selected as the Kick Start community, community leaders began collaborating with CDI and U of A Cooperative Extension Service in July of 2015.

To learn more about CDI visit www.uca.edu/cdi. To learn more about Breakthrough Solutions visit www.uaex.edu/business-communities/strategic-planning/breakthrough-solutions.aspx.







HEBER SPRINGS



SPECTACULAR BY NATURE