

Quality of life is a term that is becoming evermore important with regard to decisions about places to live, work, play and visit. Invest and spend should be added to the list. For nearly two decades, this city's government has made improving our community's quality of life paramount in guiding the decision making process. These decisions included those related to plans and projects to investments of both human and financial capital, as well as to actions and activities.

As both people and money become more and more mobile, place becomes a primary factor for retaining and attracting them, and quality of life becomes an increasingly important component of place. We must stay vigilant and aggressive in our efforts to make North Little Rock a place with the highest quality of life.

A real quality of life advantage this community has is our enviable parks and recreation system, the crown jewel of which is one of the largest urban parks in the United States, Burns Park. The time and money that has been and continues to be invested in this asset are producing many favorable returns. The beautiful 17 field soccer complex was improved with the addition of another permanent seat stand that brought the total to 1,000. These seats were fully occupied during the final of the U.S. Youth Soccer Championship Tournament that was held at our soccer complex in July. An estimated 20,000 participants and fans enjoyed a week of top flight competitive matches. While they were here, they pumped an estimated 5 million dollars into the central Arkansas economy by taking advantage of our ever expanding entertainment, food and recreation opportunities. Since the nationally recognized Burns Park Complex has been in business, it has hosted 2 U.S. Southern Region Youth Tournaments in addition to the national

tournament. Also, it is now home to the women's soccer team from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Our incomparable urban trail system is an important quality of life component that helped attract the National Trails Symposium and more than 600 attendees to North Little Rock and Little Rock this past November.

The first phase of building new 7 field youth baseball complex was undertaken last year. Undoubtedly, this first class complex will complement the premier soccer, tennis, softball and golf facilities presently available for residents, visitors, tourists and tournaments.

For the sixth year, Burns Park hosted the Holiday Lights display. As the display gets better, the attendance gets larger. Nearly 5,700 viewers in 17,000 vehicles made tours in November and December.

Burns Park was not the only part of our city's park system that saw improvements in 2008. our senior and community centers, as well as neighborhood parks, which make significant contributions to the health and well being of our citizens, received a good deal of attention. The interiors of both the Sherman Park and Glenview Community Centers were renovated. A new roof was installed at the Sherman Park Center. Glenview will have a new roof built this year.

_____ Park in Baring Cross was renovated and renamed Jim Roberts Neighborhood Park in honor of life long resident, longtime firefighter and community activist. The beautiful Old Mill celebrated its 75th Anniversary. This once deteriorating icon continued to receive tender loving care by city staff and volunteers

alike. New additions included restrooms, an amphitheater and an observation deck. As the Old Mill Park continues to improve, usage continues to increase.

Our fine facilities are made even better by the recreational opportunities, activities and programs available at them. At the recently renovated Community Center, adult fitness and wellness programs were offered to almost 5,000 users. The Glenview Center provided an adult fitness and senior programs. Also, more than 4,000 citizens visited the Glenview Center to take advantage of the free City- St. Vincent's Healthcare health clinics held on Thursdays, throughout the year.

In addition to the numerous senior activities and programs available at the Senior Center, programs for seniors were available at both the North Heights and Glenview Community Centers.

Recreational programs for our young people were also abundantly available throughout the year. At the Glenview, Sherman Park and North Heights Community Centers, free after school programs featured tutoring, arts and humanities classes, as well as recreation and athletic programs. The Tiny Tots and Youth Basketball Leagues had 349 participants between the ages of 3 and 12. The Summer Activities Program operated at three centers for 10 weeks and had 160 participants. And, the Soccer Complex became the home to 2 new central Arkansas soccer programs. Both programs feature 7 on 7 team play. One league is for high school students who do not play either high school or club soccer. The other 7 on 7 league is for adults who refuse to quit playing the game. Of course, baseball and softball leagues are available as is instruction in golf, tennis and exercise. Parks and recreation; facilities and activities; all important contributors to this community's enviable quality of life.

Our ongoing riverfront and downtown development attracted attention, visitors, residents, tourists, tournaments, rallies and money, A new city built and operated recreational vehicle park on the north shore of the Arkansas River helped attract a state regional RV Rally that brought nearly 1,000 RV's and their owners to downtown North Little Rock. The rally had an estimated economic impact of up to 6 million dollars.

Another major economic impact was realized as a direct result of the amenities and facilities of downtown. Alltel Arena served as the venue for the eight teams playing in the first round of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. Without the Arena, the new and renovated hotels, the numerous restaurants, retail stores, improved riverfronts, trolley system, galleries and museums, the estimated 5 million dollar economic impact created by hosting the tournament would not have been realized. Both tournament and rally officials and attendees were very pleased with what was available in regard to our amenities, services and support. I look forward to hosting more rallies and tournaments at the premier facilities we have built and the positive environment we have created.

Although RV Rally participants took tours of the Razorback submarine and the Inland Maritime Museum, NCAA Tournament attendees were unable to visit the Razorback submarine due to high water on the Arkansas River. Despite that loss of potential tourists, the Inland Maritime Museum realized its best attendance year as more than 20 thousand people toured the facility; a figure that nearly doubled the 2007 attendance number. Undoubtedly, this developing riverfront activity area is an attraction that will continue to bring tournaments, rallies and tourists to North Little Rock.

One of those premier facilities, Dickey-Stephens Park, Ballpark of the Year in 2007, experienced a bumper year in several ways. First, defying an overwhelming

attendance reality, more people saw Traveler's games at the stadium in its second year of existence than attended in the first season of existence. And, the Arkansas Travelers, the Texas League North Division first-half champions, brought the overall Texas League Championship Trophy to Dickey-Stephens Park. Certainly it is a welcomed addition to the Arkansas Travelers Museum that opened in the stadium last year.

Over a decade ago, the National League of Cities conducted research that proved a direct correlation between the relative health of the central core of a metropolitan area and that of the entire metropolitan region. In other words, a healthy central city and downtown, downtowns in our case means a healthy metropolitan region. In addition to the economic impacts previously described, the continuing downtown revitalization will keep producing positive results for our city and our citizens.

Over the year, much progress was made. This year began with the openings of the Enclave apartment complex and the multi-use Argenta Place. By the end of the year, the Enclave was more than 70 percent occupied. Located next to Alltel Arena, adjacent to the newly renovated Pedestrian Junction Bridge, and along the north bank of the Arkansas River, close to a trolley stop, this 260 unit upscale complex offers a true "urban" lifestyle.

Across from City Hall, the architecturally sensitive and complementary Argenta Place opened for business in January. A mix of residential condominiums, offices and a restaurant, Argenta Place will be a model for future downtown developments.

City Gove Townhomes, a four block residential development of 57 townhomes along Maple Street, began construction. These environmentally friendly, sustainable townhomes conform to "green" building standards. As more residents locate in our

downtown, increased economic activity will be generated as more goods and services are provided to meet their demand.

The City owned six acre “brownfield” located near Dickey-Stephens Park at the corner of Riverfront Drive and Smarthouse Way, was cleaned up and is ready for appropriate development. Market conditions will determine when development project proposals are requested. Ultimately, this prime piece of riverside property will be a major contribution to the revitalization of our community.

In addition to attending the existing galleries and museums, two new downtown activities made important quality of life contributions. The monthly “Artwalk”, initiated in August brought viewers artists and customers downtown on the third Friday of every month. The new “Certified Arkansas Farmers Market” did the same every Tuesday and Saturday mornings from April through October. The year ended with plans to evolve the Market local products only concept to the first full time Arkansas product grocery store. Another major event took place at year end as demolition of what was known as the “feed mill” began. Although the economic contribution of this business was significance and appreciated, the downtown complex was out of place and experienced operational difficulties. We look forward to an exciting and appropriate mixed use development at this abandoned industrial site.

Other 2008 economic development news was even more positive. The year began with the grand opening of the national distribution center for Alliance Auto Parts in Fiber Optic Park. At the Northshore Business Park, three significant developments occurred. The very successful Arkansas Surgical Hospital underwent a 13 million dollar expansion to double its size to 123 thousand square feet. The hospital employs 100 people with a

payroll of 10 million dollars. In July, one of the oldest and most well known engineering firms in the state and region, broke ground on its new 10 thousand squarefoot, 50 million dollar corporate .headquarters. This site for which we competed with other states where the company has offices, will be the state's first "green building" built for a private for profit business; Garver Engineers will employ more than 240 people in well paid engineering, technical, professional and service jobs.

Nearby, a small business will help secure our reputation as a center for bicycle amenities and commerce. Competitive Cycling began construction of an assembly and distribution facility. This business will join Orbea, Inc as two high profile representatives of the bicycling industry that make their home in North Little Rock. Orbea USA, which located here because a suitable facility was near our beautiful hiking and biking trail, underwent renovation and has expansion plans.

A significant announcement was made by the U.S. Department of Commerce last summer, when it was announced that the Economic Development Administration approved a joint City/Pulaski Technical College grant application. This 1 million dollar grant will be used to double the size and the number of graduates of the Pulaski Technical College Aerospace Technology Center which is located at the North Little Rock Airport. Yearly, more than 350 degreed and certified students will be available for the high pay jobs being created by the states burgeoning aviated aerospace industry. A key to the industry's continued growth in central Arkansas is the availability of a trained workforce.

With regard to economic development, the year closed with great anticipation concerning a new industry very interested in the empty, 705 thousand square foot Deluxe Video Services facility. Working over a period of months in close cooperation with the

Governor's office, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Metropolitan Little Rock Alliance and both North Little Rock and Little Rock Chambers of Commerce, this office and the North Little Rock Economic Development Corporation, and several city departments prepared the local portion of the Arkansas proposal submitted to the prospective company. If successfully recruited, the company in consideration will be another important contributor to the present and future economic well being of the city, region and state.

In the 1980's, the state's first "green" energy production facilities was built by the North Little Rock Electric Department at the Murray Lock and Dam on the Arkansas River. When the one cent permanent sales tax was approved in the 1990's by the citizens, an extensive comprehensive sidewalk construction program was undertaken. During the late 1990's and throughout the first eight years of the 21st Century, the city is building pedestrian/bike trails throughout our city. In 2007, the first "green" office building in North Little Rock was built by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality for its headquarters. And, in 2008, the state's first "green" office building built by a private, for profit company was built in North Little Rock. Additionally, two new "green" neighborhoods began construction last year.

Our tree planting requirements for parking lots and citywide tree planting efforts, which allowed us to be named a "Tree City, U.S.A.," for the 15th consecutive year. In retrospect, all of these contribute to a legacy of environmental emphasis that predates current concern about nonrenewable energy production, consumption and environmental sustainability.

In a major effort to build upon this foundation, the North Little Rock Green Initiative Agenda strengthened its position as the most outstanding city program in Arkansas. In 2008, a Green Agenda Committee was established. This multi-disciplinary working group that will help citizens and businesses gain access to information, materials; programs and policies that enable them to reduce energy consumption, as well as emissions. Our environmental credentials were further augmented last year when we became the 1st city in Arkansas and the 30th in the United States to complete a baseline carbon emissions study of city operations. This highly advantageous legacy must and will be productively expanded and extended for the benefit of this but, especially for generations to come. For, the decisions we make and the actions we take today will determine the quality of life we have tomorrow. This after all, is the ultimate quality of life issue.