

LANDING THAT JOB

DRAFT DAY DRAWS BIG CROWD



PLUS:

5 GIG CITY
JU SPOILS INTERNS
STARTING WITH STEM



JONESBORO
UNLIMITED

ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT REPORT
2ND QUARTER 2023

BE PRO BE PROUD

DRAFT DAY GETS GREAT RESULTS

They were getting job interviews before they even got their diploma.

[Be Pro Be Proud's](#) Draft Day made that happen for over 100 Jonesboro area high school seniors.

BPBP closed the 2022-2023 school year with Draft Day at Nettleton High School on April 11. This was the second time BPBP held a Draft Day in Jonesboro, following up last year's event at Jonesboro High School.

Draft Day allows local students with education and experience in skilled trades to have pre-scheduled interviews with local employers looking to land fresh young talent. Students who signed up were guaranteed at least three interviews.

"Since we kicked off our statewide tour last month, nearly 3,000 students across the state have interviewed with area employers or been introduced to lucrative technical career paths," said Andrew Parker, Executive Director of Be Pro Be Proud, "This work is just the beginning of what we can accomplish to strengthen and reinforce our workforce for future generations."

That's BPBP's mission. Their purpose is to connect students around the state to high-tech, high-paying careers through partnerships with state agencies, local industries, and higher education entities. Be Pro Be Proud is effectively working to change the perception of technical professions in Arkansas and the United States.

"We are seeing students that are excited to be going to work immediately after graduation, and we are here to show them how many opportunities are available to them," said Christy Valentine of Hytrol, Draft Day's Presenting Sponsor.

The message hit home for the students who took advantage of the opportunity.

"It was a very good experience," said Colby Miller, a Nettleton Senior, "It showed me what later on in life interviews would be like. It honestly gave me a confidence boost."

A month after graduation, Miller is already at work, having earned an apprenticeship as an electrician.

"A lot of them are very interested in younger people that they usually wouldn't be interested in," Miller said.

Be Pro Be Proud is already planning another stop in Jonesboro in 2024.



SERIOUS ABOUT STEM

TEKSTARZ GOES CAMPING

TekStarz, Jonesboro's Manufacturing Camp, took 18 local Junior High School students on a four-day tour to see how science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) classes connect with manufacturing.

Ten different Jonesboro employers, Arkansas State University, and Arkansas State University-Newport hosted the students over the four days.

"It's fun to see the kids connect so quickly with the people at the companies who host us," said Shelle Randall, Director of Workforce Development and Existing Industry at Jonesboro Unlimited (JU), "You can really see the moment they 'get it' and how what they are learning in school translates to a job someday."

Each employer gave the students an inside look at what working in STEM in manufacturing could look like for them. From welding to using virtual and augmented reality, the students got much more hands-on time than they expected.

"This was cool!" was the phrase that echoed through the bus after every stop.

8th grader Michael John Rickert said, "We didn't just sit around and listen to people talking. We got to do things and build things."

The campers got a behind-the-scenes look at ABB, Nice-Pak, Frito-Lay, Unilever, Nabholz, Ritter Communications, Best Manufacturing, Hytrol, FMH Conveyors, and Trinity Rail. They also visited Arkansas State University-Newport and the Garage at Arkansas State University. Be Pro Be Proud helped cap off the week by bringing their Mobile Workshop to Hytrol for Parents Night for the students and their families to get some virtual "hands-on" work. The families saw a [video of the week's experiences](#).

TekStarz's roots are in workforce development. Jonesboro Unlimited's mission to develop a workforce starts long before a college major is declared. And it's not just the students JU seeks out.

"TekStarz goes hand in hand with our Industry Educators Externship that we hold in the fall," Randall said, "In that program, we take teachers on a three-day tour very much like TekStarz to help them understand the kind of jobs that await their students someday and how they can stoke that interest and connect lessons and learning with finding a career."

As far as favorites of the week? That's a question that is hard to answer. 18 kids, 18 different opinions. As soon as one of the students would give a response, you'd be sure to hear another say, "Oh yeah, I want to change my answer!"

The positive energy was all around. The students had fun.

They were engaged. And they learned a lot. When you can attend a summer camp like that AND stay in the air conditioning, that's a win-win.



RED CARPET TREATMENT

JU GIVES INTERNS THE GRAND TOUR

Internships represent a great opportunity for aspiring young professionals. Finding the right company to evolve classroom potential into workplace skills shows a company's commitment and investment in a prospective employee. It puts the intern ahead of the curve in finding that first job. However, a different company in another community may be cashing in on that investment.

"Internships can sometimes miss one thing," says Shelle Randall, Director of Workforce Development and Existing Industries at Jonesboro Unlimited (JU), "You have the interns in your community for only a couple of months in most cases. We want to get them to feel at home, even if it is for just a short while."

Jonesboro companies bring in dozens of college interns each summer. JU believes it's a perfect opportunity to sell Jonesboro as an enriching place to live if that job offer comes after graduation. That's why JU hosts its Get To Know Jonesboro (GTKJB) program. The goal is to spend a day with the interns, showing them places and things uniquely Jonesboro.

This year, 24 interns from Frito-Lay, Hytrol, FMH Conveyors, and law firm Waddell, Cole, and Jones came along for the ride.

The day involves stops at Shadrachs, lunch at Lost Pizza, the Crowley's Ridge Nature Center, Craighead Forest Park, and Hijinx. Fun all around, with a dash of caring for others thrown in. The interns packed 9,600 meals at the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas. A favorite part of the day for several participants including Hytrol intern Rachel Verhoef.

"This experience showed me just how much everyone in this community truly cares for each other no matter their status and are driven to provide all resources to those who are in dire need," Verhoef said.

The latest GTKJB tour was the third year JU hosted the interns.

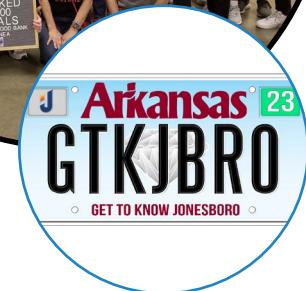
"Whether they've already been hired or that new job is on the horizon, it's really important to connect with your new community as much as your cubicle!" Randall said, smiling.

There's evidence the program is working. Frito-Lay has hired four former interns in recent years. All of them took part in the GTKJB program. Christy Valentine, Manager of Academic Partnerships at Hytrol, says they've hired four engineers from their intern program in the last two years. She says making them feel welcomed outside the office makes them feel much more at home.

"It really gives them a head start," Valentine said.

JU believes GTKJB is as much about employee retention as it is about workforce development. By helping a newcomer or a future newcomer to settle in with some local knowledge already in place, the likelihood of that person building a life in Jonesboro can span years.

That's how you establish a strong workforce that moves from generation to generation instead of job to job.



INFRASTRUCTURE

JONESBORO IS A 5 GIG CITY

Ritter Communications' 100% fiber optic service, RightFiber, is officially online. Ritter CEO Alan Morse made the announcement in early May. The announcement follows the decision by the City of Jonesboro to make Ritter and RightFiber its official residential broadband partner. A decision Jonesboro Mayor Harold Copenhaver was thrilled to make.

"At that time, I was beyond excited at the prospect of RightFiber's capabilities in making Jonesboro a true Gig City with one Gig internet," said the Mayor, "However, in just six short months, they have doubled down on their intentions and given us not only 2 gig, but also 5 gig RightFiber speed. I think it is safe to say that when it came to choosing a broadband partner, we made the right choice."

By offering speeds up to 5 gigs, Jonesboro now has the fastest residential internet service in Arkansas, according to Ritter Communications.



AIRPORT LANDS GRANT

The Jonesboro Municipal Airport landed an FAA grant worth nearly \$4M to lengthen and strengthen the airport's runway and tarmac.

It is the second grant since the airport received a grant worth \$5M in the fall of 2022. That grant will fund the lengthening of the airport's main runway from 6,400 feet to 7,000 feet.

The improvements to the runway and tarmac change the size of aircraft the Jonesboro Municipal Airport can support. With the new enhancements, an Airbus or Boeing 737 could safely operate out of the airport.



George Jackson, Manager of the Jonesboro Municipal Airport, says the improvements are set to start in early August.

TRAILS GOING STRONG

The newest mountain biking trail at Craighead Forest Park is open for use. Danny Kapales, Director of Jonesboro Parks and Recreation, says riders are free to try the new course, but more work still needs to be done. Kapales says Rock Solid, the company building the latest trail, will return to finish it in the fall when temperatures cool.



The new trail connecting downtown Jonesboro to the A-State campus keeps moving ahead. Kapales says the City is working to move the utilities on Creath Street to prepare for building this vital leg of the project.

HEALTHCARE

NYITCOM CELEBRATES CLASS OF 2023

115 new doctors were hooded in early May as NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine graduated its fourth class of new physicians. Over 60 percent of the new doctors matched in programs that will keep them in Arkansas, a targeted-Delta state, or a state contiguous to Arkansas. That's why NYIT-COM at A-State was established, to help address a shortage of physicians in this part of the country.

According to NYITCOM, 75 percent of the Class of 2023 will perform their residency in a primary care specialty. Those new doctors begin their residencies in July.

ENCOMPASS EXPANDING

Encompass Rehabilitation Hospital of Jonesboro will soon expand from 74 to 90 beds. According to Encompass, the 9,000 SF expansion is already underway at the facility on Fleming Avenue. The permit filed with the City of Jonesboro puts the project cost at \$6M. Nabholz Construction is leading the project.

The expansion creates 16 completely private rooms for patients of Encompass. The company says the hospital is consistently at capacity, thus requiring additional space.

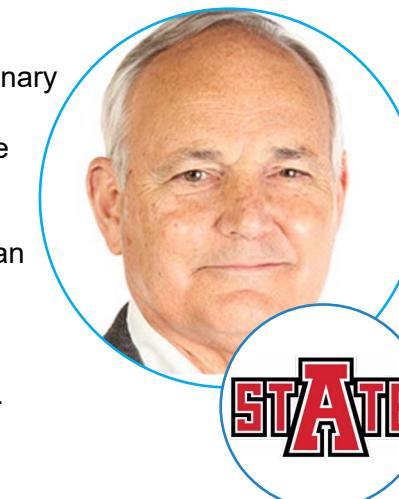
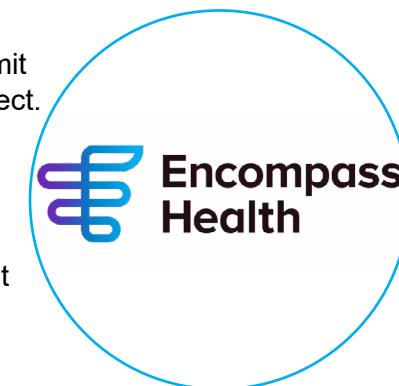
Clint Morten, Facilities Director for Encompass, says crews will pour the slab in July. Morten adds that plans call for moving into the new addition in February 2024.

ON CAMPUS NEW VET SCHOOL NAMES DEAN

Arkansas State University has announced the founding Dean for the university's new school of veterinary medicine. A-State named Dr. Glen Hoffsis to the post in mid-June. A-State says Hoffsis' roles are to provide day-to-day leadership as A-State continues its pathway toward accreditation and opening. He will also lead the search for the new school's permanent Dean.

Hoffsis has extensive experience in veterinary medicine and education, having previously been a dean for Ohio State University and the University of Florida. He guided the creation of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee.

In March, the ASU System Board of Trustees voted to approve the initiative to create the new school. Arkansas is one of 19 states that does not currently have a vet school.



COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT



Jonesboro's first Dunkin' Donuts is on the way. Greensborough Village is the home of the famous national franchise. Construction has begun on the project. You can expect to grab some glazed donuts and coffee before the end of the year.



It's sweet. No doubt about it. Deso Chocolate is opening in University Lofts at Greensborough Village. Halsey Thrasher Harpole made the tasty announcement in April. Deso says they specialize in liquid chocolate delights, crepes, waffles, and other treats.



Things are getting crafty at the corner of Caraway and Highland. Michael's, the nation's largest arts and crafts retail chain, is opening its newest store in the Highland Square Shopping Center. Haag Brown made the announcement in April. Look for opening day late this summer.



Another Guthrie's Chicken is headed to Jonesboro. The newest location's home is on Hilltop in Haag Brown's new strip mall next to Fat City. The owner says they expect to be dishing out the chicken tenders and fries in late August.



There's going to be a new vibe in Downtown Jonesboro. The Vibe Interiors by Kim Biggs is moving in at the corner of Huntington and Union in the former Westbrook Premier Kitchen and Bath. The Vibe comes downtown from its previous location on Sunny Meadow Drive behind the Malco.



Tee off without needing to check the weather. Divots Golf Lounge is coming to Greensborough Village. The 8,000 SF facility features simulator bays that allow you to play dozens of courses worldwide. You should be able to start booking tee times late this year or early next year.



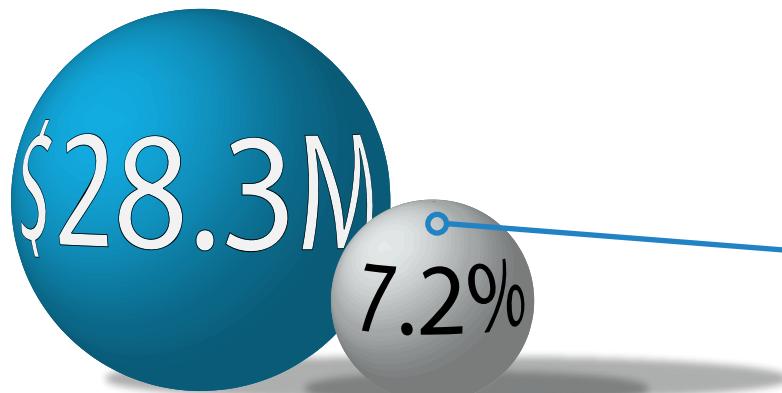
It feels like a sequel. A 16-screen movie theater complex is underway just past NEA Baptist Hospital on East Johnson. University 16 has been in the works for years and is now ready for its close-up! The \$4M permit was filed in May. The owners plan to be open for the summer blockbuster season in 2024.



Nettleton's STEAM Academy will undergo renovations of the school's cafeteria. The project has three phases: new plumbing, electrical, and HVAC upgrades. Tate General Contractors filed the \$600,000 permit.

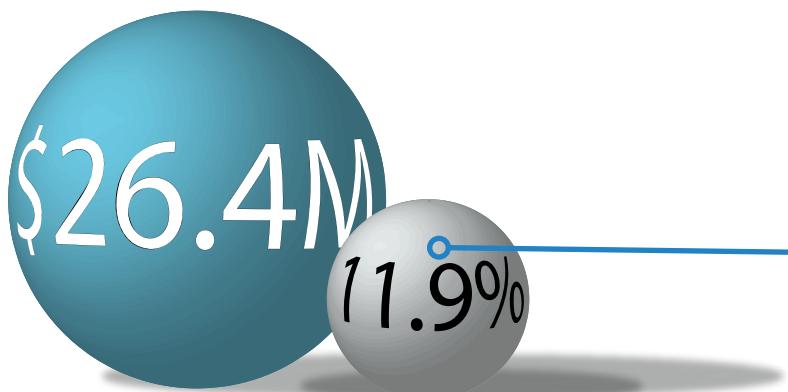
SALES TAX REVENUE

YEAR-TO-DATE, CITY AND COUNTY COMBINED (2.0%)



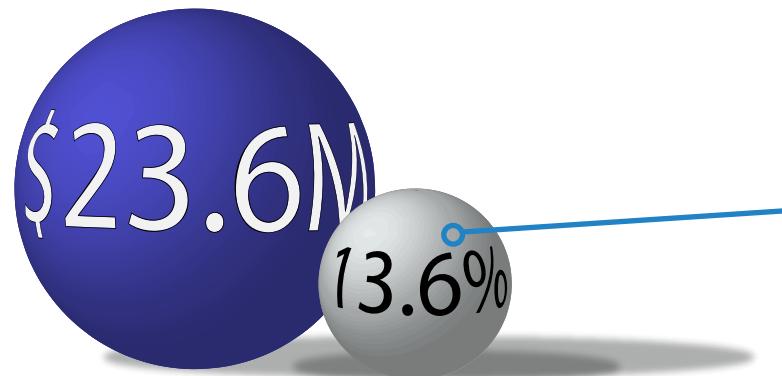
2023 / *jan thru june*

Increase in collections over 2022. 19.9% increase over 2021



2022 / *jan thru june*

Increase in collections over 2021. 27% increase over 2020



2021 / *jan thru june*

Increase in collections over 2020

COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION

YEAR-TO-DATE 2023-2021



\$84.0M

2023 / *jan
thru
june*

- Includes a record 56 permits (\$15.7M) for commercial alterations



\$105M

2022 / *jan
thru
june*

- Includes \$63M in permits (16) for new construction



\$110M

2021 / *jan
thru
june*

- Includes \$54M in permits (32) for new construction

Permit totals include: new construction, apartments, additions, alterations, & signs

RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION

YEAR-TO-DATE 2023-2021

2023 / *jan
thru
june*

Includes 135 permits for new home construction (\$26.2M)

271 Permits

\$32.6M

2022 / *jan
thru
june*

Includes 160 permits for new home construction (\$31.6M)

296 Permits

\$37.5M

2021 / *jan
thru
june*

Includes 270 permits for new home construction (\$40.4M)

385 Permits

\$46.9M

Permit totals include: new homes, additions, alterations, duplex, storage, & swimming pools

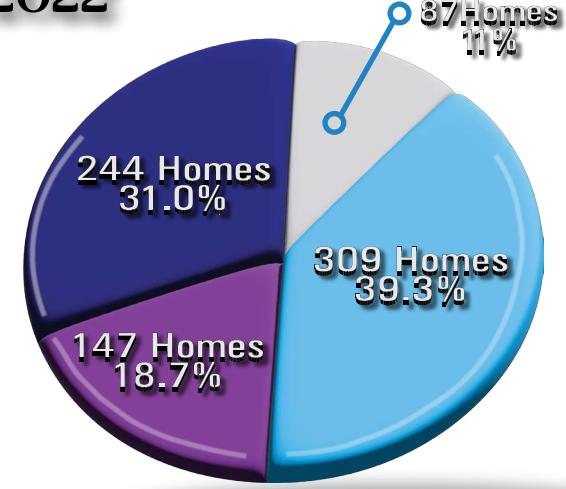
HOME SALES*

YEAR-TO-DATE 2023-2022

787
Homes
Sold

2023 / *jan
thru
june*

29.2% fewer homes sold vs
1st two QTRS of 2022.



1,112
Homes
Sold

2022 / *jan
thru
june*

7.7% increase in homes
sold vs 1st two QTRS of 2021.

