



## **State of the City**

### **January 24, 2012**

**2011 – Historical & Memorable! From record cold, record snow fall, record rainfall, and record heat to wonderful news – 2011 had it all!**

**Recently *Travel and Leisure* magazine named Bentonville as one of the Hottest Travel Destinations of 2012, the only destination in the United States. This distinction is directly related to the opening of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. The opening marked the beginning of change for Bentonville and Northwest Arkansas as a destination for the arts. More than 125,000 people have visited the museum during its first 100 days! Alice Walton, in describing why she decided to build Crystal Bridges said, “When you give a gift, you want to give something that you hope greatly enriches and transforms other lives. So I guess it’s that potential that made me feel like it was the right thing to do.” This one exceptionally spectacular gift will truly be**

**the catalyst of future economic growth for this entire region. I know I speak for many when I say “Thank You” to Alice Walton for her vision and enormous generosity. Additionally, sincere thanks to the Walton Family Foundation for their continued support and tremendous gifts to our community...too many to mention here.**

**The mission of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art is to welcome all to celebrate the American spirit in a setting that unites the power of art with the beauty of landscape. Wal-Mart’s \$20 million grant to cover to cost of admission makes it possible for everyone to visit the museum at no charge. Free admission for the world! Thank you Wal-Mart and your worldwide associates!**

**Too, I’d like to thank The Willard & Pat Walker School Visit Program for funding the cost of transportation and lunches for public and private K-12 students and teachers. This is a priceless gift of creativity for Arkansas children and their instructors.**

**Finally, I’d like to thank the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce, the Bentonville Convention & Visitors Bureau, Downtown Bentonville, Inc., our City Council and City of Bentonville staff members. All have worked diligently toward**

**making our thriving downtown a place to be proud of and a place for everyone to enjoy.**

**2011 was a year of accolades! In August, *Arkansas Business* magazine referred to the City of Bentonville as the “most prominent small city in the world” and subsequently named Bentonville a 2011 City of Distinction in two categories: Main Street Preservation and Quality of Life. These honors acknowledge Bentonville for the vibrancy of its downtown and its impressive recreational and wellness programs.**

**For the first time, the City won the coveted SHINE Award sponsored by the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Commission. This award recognizes the City for its outstanding environmental and community improvement efforts. Bentonville’s entry focused on the numerous beautification and tourism initiatives executed prior to the opening of Crystal Bridges. One of these initiatives was the new way finding signage. The signage is a first for a municipality in NWA and is the result of a partnership with the Bentonville Convention and Visitors Bureau.**

**Although Bentonville’s 2011 sales tax receipts fell below 2010 receipts by 4.5%; we exceeded our projected revenue for 2011 by 4%. The County portion of our sales tax receipts was 25% over 2010 and 29% over projected revenue. 2011 total sales tax collections exceeded budget by \$1 million. We are fortunate to be able to set aside**

**more than \$9 million in our fund balance, this fund helps insure the City's ability to provide uninterrupted services going forward.**

**For the fourth year in a row, we have kept our number of full time employees steady at 385. The commitment to strategically manage personnel attrition and retirement has allowed the City to bring on two new positions in 2011 without increasing the overall headcount. We continue to focus on staffing critical areas that are experiencing rapid growth. This focus has allowed the City to develop and expand programs and services associated with technology and growth.**

**I am pleased to report that development activity is on the rise following the historic slowdown experienced in 2008 and 2009. Items submitted to City Planning for review rose 15% from 2010. The number of preliminary platted lots rose by more than 70% indicating the housing market is on the upswing. Benton County recorded 593 building permits in its 5 largest cities. Bentonville permits alone accounted for more than 58% of this 2011 total!**

**Approximately 456,000 square feet of new commercial development was approved through the large-scale development review process during 2011 representing an increase of 28% over 2010. Our records indicate commercial valuations grew by**

**106% from \$32 million in 2010 to \$66 million in 2011, this is a very healthy indicator of improving economics. Fees related to development recorded an increase of 62%.**

**City Utilities saw the total number of accounts exceed 19,000 for the first time. With a strong commitment to customer service and professionalism, our Utility Billing team managed the collection and administration of more than \$70 million in utilities provided to businesses and residents within our service area.**

**The City's 4 year old recycling initiative saw Bentonville residents recycle more than 4 million pounds of "trash" this past year. This computes to approximately 39 tons per week or an average of more than 330 lbs. per year per household. Great job!**

**The City's Electric & Engineering Department continued its commitment to reduce overall costs and electrical usage. In 2011, the Electric Department purchased a grapple truck to help insure continuous service through vegetation management. Other departments within in the city have benefitted from this investment, especially during the June windstorm. The Electric staff oversaw the construction of our 9<sup>th</sup> substation, Substation "I". Located on SW Morning Star Road, the new substation provides a secondary feed and more reliable service to the large commercial customers in the area and addresses new development on Bright Road as well as residential growth in the SW section of town. The team continues to improve the**

reliability of our electric system by rebuilding old lines, replacing older poles, installing capacitor banks, and updating old transformers.

In addition to a strong commitment to provide an uninterrupted supply of safe water for our City's 37,000 plus residents and 100's of businesses, the Water and Sewer rehab team cleaned over 186 miles of wastewater lines in 2011 and performed inspections on an additional 16 miles of lines critical to our total operation.

Featured in the Shine Award nomination, the City's Wastewater Department initiated the FOG Campaign to increase resident's awareness of the negative impact FOG (fat, oil and grease) has on our sewer system and water quality. The campaign kicked-off with an informational article in the city's newsletter in June 2011 followed by the creation of a superhero character, the "Bentonville FOG Fighter". This fictional character is currently being used to promote the FOG campaign throughout the elementary schools.

Last year the Wastewater Department treated a total of 1.5 billion gallons of wastewater or an average of 4 million gallons per day. This treatment process produced many tons of bio solids of which approximately 40% was utilized in our composting facility with the remainder being landfilled or land applied out of state.

**More than one year ago the City began diverting 300,000 gallons per day of wastewater to the newly constructed Northwest Arkansas Conservation Authority wastewater treatment facility. This past June, we began diverting an additional 1.2 million gallons of wastewater per day to NACA. This relieves the City's capacity issues at the "A" Street facility for the current time.**

**Bentonville has taken a leadership role in establishing and expanding relationships with Rogers, Springdale, Fayetteville and Siloam Springs through the NW Arkansas Intergovernmental Working Group. The primary focus of this IWG is Water and Wastewater Discharge Issues related to E.P.A.'s oversight of Bentonville and the Illinois River. The City remains steadfast in its challenge to EPA's unfounded, non-scientific mandate regarding phosphorous levels in Town Branch. We are working with experts to scientifically document conditions so that we can continue to be a good steward of both the environment and taxpayer resources.**

**The Public Works Director and the Airport Advisory Board, continue their efforts to make our municipal airport a great community asset. Links to the airport's website can now be found on the home pages of the Chamber of Commerce, Bentonville Convention and Visitors Bureau and Crystal Bridges. With a hopeful eye toward obtaining future federal and state grant monies, the vision for the airport was shared with the FAA and the Arkansas Department of Aeronautics at two separate meetings.**

**Both agencies expressed enthusiasm and support for the overall plan and direction. The future of the Bentonville Municipal Airport is very bright.**

**The Transportation Department completed &/or began an extensive and impressive list of initiatives: a new bridge at Shell Road, to the pleasure of many – completed Hwy. 102 West, installed traffic signals at 28<sup>th</sup> and Medical Center Parkway, and addressed drainage projects at SW “D” and Ivy Place. The team also oversaw the final design for the Highway 12 project plus the initial plans for the 8<sup>th</sup> Street project. The City partnered with Benton County and the Bentonville School District to develop future design improvements at Windmill Road. Construction continues on SW “I” South and on the East Central Improvement projects.**

**The Fire Department received a FEMA grant to install a traffic signal pre-emption system in every Fire Department vehicle. The Department’s vehicles now have the capability to control 24 traffic signals within the city. This advanced system greatly improves roadway intersection safety of not only our Fire staff and equipment, but also the safety of the general public. The Fire Department staff answered a record 3,741 EMS runs, 686 Fire and Hazmat calls and 427 other type calls for a grand total of 4,854 calls for the year { an increase of 11.5% over 2010}. Thankfully, the City experienced no loss of life due to fire in 2011. The Fire Department’s commitment to**



**public education resulted in over 9,000 children and almost 4,000 adults attending fire safety presentations.**

**The Police Department marked its first full year of use of new operating software. New capabilities related to this software system include: mapping, officer status updates, and call information availability, all of which improved functions critical to the department's day to day operations.**

**Mobile Dispatch Terminals were upgraded with motor vehicle accident report forms, allowing officers to complete most investigations from their patrol cars. Likewise, Arkansas State mandated Bias Based Policing requirements also went paperless, allowing officers to document details of their citizen contacts from their MDT's.**

**In Dispatch, a recently upgraded audio recording system now provides better and more reliable documentation of phone calls and radio traffic by allowing simultaneous play back of all applicable channels.**

**Criminal Investigations Division benefited from the recent software upgrades with improved information flow and research capabilities. Detectives and Dispatchers became involved with the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) and received training sponsored by the FBI. The United States Secret Service also provided five weeks of training and approximately \$30,000 worth of Computer Forensic**

**Equipment.** As a result of this training and equipment, a dedicated computer forensics area has been set up allowing our team state-of-the-art resources to handle child exploitation and other computer related investigations. Narcotics related investigations resulted in the seizure of \$200,000 in cash and property. One measure of success is the end result, or disposition, of the cases handled. In 2011, two high profile cases handled by Bentonville Detectives resulted in life sentences for the accused offenders.

Despite a steady number of calls for service, 2011 was greatly without the types of crimes or incidents that generally cause major concern for the community. Credit for such a crime free atmosphere is in part due to our Police Department's overall community involvement. In 2011, the Bentonville Police Department partnered with several organizations including Crystal Bridges, Downtown Bentonville, and numerous others to promote and ensure safe events and activities. The Police Department also provided support to other organizations in the community including, the newly established Arkansas Visitation and Exchange Center (AVEC), Shop with a Cop, and the Meth Awareness Task Force. On duty officers visited each of the public schools in our city to familiarize themselves with the buildings, staff, and procedures. Bike Officers spent a record amount of time patrolling the trail system and downtown area and dedicated one officer to execute these patrols each day.

**The Chevrolet Tahoe has been purchased as a replacement patrol vehicle for the Ford Crown Victoria no longer in production. The Police Package Tahoe offers a new look for the Department and provides more room for equipment and gear. Additionally, this vehicle offers improved visibility, capability and safety. Officer uniforms were upgraded in 2011. The new uniform has a more traditional/ formal, appearance and displays a redesigned arm patch that more clearly identifies our police officers.**

**Numerous improvements were made to Police headquarters. Improvements, along with updated color schemes and new furnishings provide a more modern and updated appearance to the overall interior. On the exterior, new landscaping designs and plantings add to the remodeled interior. These improvements have provided a better working environment for employees and have extended the life of the facility itself. Overall, these improvements help promote the professional image of our Police Department and our City.**

**In 2011 the City of Bentonville Legal Department focused on positive prosecution, while working closely with the Bentonville Police Department. Efforts included education to increase public safety and reduce future offenses, such as mandated defensive driving classes for defendants charged with accident related violations, drug and alcohol assessments, education and treatment for alcohol and drug**

**offenders, and anger management and domestic abuse intervention for violent defendants. The Staff Attorney attended intensive instruction sponsored by the National Center for DWI Courts in preparation for the program's Bentonville launch in January of 2012. These programs are widely recognized for using accountability and long-term treatment to target hardcore impaired drivers.**

**Parks and Recreation programs and facilities continue to grow in popularity. The Melvin Ford Aquatic Center saw a 10% increase in both participation and revenue during 2011. In the first full season of operation, over 10,000 people enjoyed skating at Lawrence Plaza. Fall soccer programs, girl's spring and fall softball, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Bentonville Running Festival all saw record numbers of participants and attendees.**

**The Downtown Square began a new tradition in March with more than 2,000 tulips{ courtesy of the Bentonville Garden Club}, and fresh fescue sod announcing the end of winter and inviting residents and visitors alike to walk and visit the downtown area.**

**The Judge William and Miriam Enfield Park and Trail opened in 2011. Located on NE Waverly Way, this one-acre park provides open green space and a pavilion for**

**public use. The trail will prove to be a very popular link to the Crystal Bridges Trail and the trails that meander around the new museum.**

**The Parks and Recreation Department oversaw the opening of two other trails in 2011: First, the South Bentonville Trail connecting the Downtown Square to the southernmost borders of our community, this trail connects restaurants, hospitals, schools and many office buildings. Stretching 2.5 miles from the Square, this trail will bring trails users all the way to our Downtown Square. This important link is included in the Razorback Greenway, a 26-mile trail beginning in Bentonville, traveling through each major city in Northwest Arkansas before terminating in South Fayetteville. Second is our first successful attempt to connect to residents on the eastern side of Interstate 540. This 3/4-mile trail connects the Northwest Arkansas Community College and the David Glass Technology Center on Moberly.**

**Staff members from the City's Parks and Recreation Department and Community Development Department partnered to create a new Trails Committee comprised of representatives from Transportation, Engineering, GIS, and Police. This committee quickly identified safe routes for cyclists to move throughout our city. As a result, the City installed more than 17 miles of bike sharrows for residents who choose cycling as a recreational hobby or a means for transportation. In 2012 and beyond, the**

**Trails Committee will continue to work to make our community a bicycle and pedestrian friendly community.**

**The City's newest recreational facility, the Downtown Activity Center, located on SW A Street opened in September. This new facility houses Bentonville's Parks and Recreation staff and offers a wide variety of wellness programs for residents. Fitness and wellness classes featuring training in aerobics, yoga, boot camps, and spinning are now available at this new facility. Additionally, the Downtown Activity Center provides our citizens with a one-stop location for obtaining information about all of our recreation programs, including baseball, soccer, football, tennis and volleyball. In 2012, this facility will begin to host programs such as a "Couch Potato to 1/2 Marathon" training program and summer camps for kids.**

**Last year, we opened our new 12 court Memorial Park Tennis Complex. However, this new complex abandoned an outdated four-court facility just a quarter mile away. This fall, Parks and Recreation converted those old courts to a new four court, lighted basketball facility. This conversion cost was under \$30,000 and instantly became the first complex of its type in Northwest Arkansas.**

**Recently, renovations to our community's oldest park, Park Springs Park, were completed. The \$160,000 face-lift included the installation of a new, natural play**

element designed to fit into the urban forest environment created by the park. Restrooms have new fixtures, new equipment and new lighting. The pavilion has a new roof, new lighting and new picnic tables. Thanks to the commitment of the Tree and Landscape Committee, a new entry feature and landscaping cap off the renovations that will preserve this historic site for many years to come. Hopefully next year we will report that construction is underway or near on the +70,000 S.F. Community Center to be located on 34 acres at the intersection of Hiway 12 and Hiway 112.

The Bentonville Public Library continues to grow in popularity and in services offered to its members. More than 277,000 visits were made to the library in 2011. Children and teens read an impressive 18,000 hours during the Library's Summer Reading Program this past June and July. Near 100,000 items were checked out during the two-month reading program.

The Library's 103,000 item collection was utilized more than ½ million times in 2011. During the past year approximately 6,000 new library cards were issued by staff demonstrating the growing popularity of this tremendous asset to our community.

**Last year, the Library assisted in the purchase of property across the street at 402 South Main. A portion of the existing building is dedicated to off-site library storage plus 40 additional parking spaces that may be used for overflow.**

**Mid 2011 a remodeled children's department, story time and craft space was made available to accommodate more children. This improvement allowed the library to add approximately 400 square feet, essentially doubling the dedicated space for children's programs. This project was made possible by a grant from the Carl and Alleen McKinney Charitable Trust.**

**In 2012, the Bentonville Public Library is committed its goals and objectives as outlined in the strategic plan. Examples of these strategic goals include: improve services to low socio-economic demographics, improve digital offerings, support of diversity and cultural awareness, expanded computer class offerings and value added programs and services for youth and adults.**

**The City and the entire Library staff are grateful for the continued support of its many patrons and sponsoring organizations. In 2011, volunteers donated over 6,000 hours to the Bentonville Library, a 33% increase over 2010. This contribution is valued at over \$133,000.**



**For the second year in a row, Bentonville was named a Volunteer Community of the Year by the State of Arkansas Bentonville was the recipient of the Volunteer Community of the Year Award, proving that our citizenry is one that cares about its community and its people. In 2011, 11,535 volunteers recorded more than 221,000 hours of service resulting in a gift to our community of \$4.6 million.**

**In 2011, I initiated an Outstanding Citizen Award Program. This program is designed to recognize those that go out of their way to help others. I am inspired and awed by the varied acts of kindness detailed in the nominations we've received. It has been my pleasure to honor these individuals and we will continue this program in 2012. Information about the program can be found on our website.**

**To close, 2011 was also a year of enormous collaboration and teamwork. If you look closely at our accomplishments of 2011, you will see at the core, partnerships in everything we do.**

**Going into 2012, the public can continue to expect exemplary service from the City's 385 employees. We are committed to serving professionally, with character and integrity all that live, work and visit within our City.**

**The current financial condition of our City is a result of excellent planning and teamwork. The conservative disciplines embraced by Council and Staff allow for uncompromised funding for the critical public safety, utility and quality of life amenities that make our City a special place to live and work.**

**I know of no other City, [anywhere], with a brighter future than Bentonville – all of the important measures of the City’s health are remarkably strong. I believe we are entering enter a period of unprecedented growth and development with the tools needed to succeed.**

**Our City is in profoundly sound condition!**

**May the spirit of community and the commitment to quality of life remain high priority as we embrace change and its related opportunities in the coming years.**

**Thank you and may God continue to bless our City and Northwest Arkansas.**

**Mayor Bob McCaslin**

**City of Bentonville**