

The Alliance — uniting chambers, EDCCC

2-10-10

The following is the fifth and final of a series of articles informing the public on how the county's economic development effort is set up.

By Joe Phelps
Sittings Herald

Until the Arkadelphia Regional Economic Development Alliance was formed, there was no system in Clark County that unified all economic development organizations with one goal; although each organization shared the same interest in recruiting jobs in the county for growth.

It could be compared to

how the 13 original colonies of the U.S. became a union.

Prior to the U.S. Constitution were the Articles of Confederation, which loosely united each of the 13 original colonies into one country. The 13 states had one goal — to be a united, independent country — but what it lacked was a centralized government. Under the Articles of Confederation, each state set its own laws.

A decade later, the Constitution was written to turn that loose confederation into a strengthened federation of states with one centralized government, though each state in the union had its own government.

Likewise, the Alliance was formed to unify all economic development organizations in Clark County.

Prior to the Alliance, there was the Clark County Industrial Council and two chambers of commerce. Then, a 1/2-cent sales tax was passed in 2007 to fund a public entity, which later came to be known as the Economic Development Corp. of Clark County.

The CCIC was and still is a quasi-government agency that holds the title to all industrial lands in the county, and has a 50-year library of economic development data for the county. It has been in existence since the 1980s.

The Arkadelphia Area Chamber of Commerce and the Gurdon Chamber of Commerce represent their respective community's private sector of business. Their funding comes from memberships from businesses or individuals within their community. Shortly after the Alliance was formed, a chamber was formed in Amity.

The EDCCC is a public entity which operates on a projected annual budget of \$1.25 million from the sales tax, and its executive director, Shawnie Carrier, represents the county and works with site consultants and prospects in hopes of re-

cruting industries. Seventy percent of the EDCCC's budget is reserved to provide incentives, development and land acquisitions for prospective industries.

Each organization shared the common interest of creating jobs in Clark County, whether they be in the industrial or retail field. But each organization stood alone.

When Paul Harvel was hired as chief executive officer of the EDCCC, he proposed unifying each organization into one county-wide economic development group (while each organiza-

See ALLIANCE, page 3

ALLIANCE

Continued from Page 1

tion can keep its own mission statement and be governed by its own board).

The EDCCC voted in favor of the change, and since that time all of the organizations operate under the "umbrella" system known as the Alliance.

Harvel has since resigned from the Alliance and EDCCC, leaving Carrier to take over his duties.

The Alliance's board is composed of members of the organizations that make up the Alliance. The executive members of the EDCCC (the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary), the chair and vice-chair of the Clark County Strategic Plan, the president of the CCKC, and the president of each chamber of commerce.

Thirty percent of the Alliance's budget is funded by the 1/2-cent sales tax, and the rest comes from private funds. The public funds pay for administrative costs (salaries, marketing and office supplies), but does not pay the salary of the Arkadelphia Chamber's executive director. Other monies that fund the Alliance come from contracts with the Arkadelphia Area Chamber of Commerce, the city of Arkadelphia and other private donations from area businesses. Private moneys fund the Chamber as well as other activities the sales tax cannot fund (there are strict guidelines as to how the sales tax can be spent).

The city of Arkadelphia contracted \$40,000 with

the Alliance this year, a portion of which will help pay for the start-up of the Diamond Lakes Visitors Center in Caddo Valley.

Other than simply "uniting" each economic development entity in the county, what does the Alliance do, and how does the umbrella system benefit its fundametal organizations?

It "oversees the chambers of commerce for Arny, Arkadelphia and Gordon, the EDCCC and the CCKC," Carrier said. "It is a perfect example of a public private partnership. The Alliance works to retain jobs in the county and attract new ones.

"It markets what Clark County has to offer such as its unique position on Interstate 30 and scenic highway 7, two universities, DeGray Lake and three Chambers of Commerce. "The goal of the Alliance is to market ourselves as a good place to live, work and play."

Although the Alliance hopes to attract new commerce and industry to Clark County, the county's current business and industrial employers are top priority, Carrier said. "I feel strongly that existing business and industry have to be considered first and foremost."

The Alliance also implements Leadership Clark County, a program aimed at developing emerging leaders with issues, programs, and activities aimed at improving the county as well as supporting the character and heritage of Clark County. Leslie Bright, communications and research director for the Alliance, helps coordinate the program.