

## What's right with Arkadelphia

By Dan Marsh

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Okay, we've heard a lot about what's wrong with Arkadelphia.

But what's right with Arkadelphia?

What was it about Arkadelphia that appealed to me, for example? I didn't necessarily have to move back home. I was perfectly happy in Sherman, Texas. I could shop for books round the clock; buy cheap CDs; go to a heckuva nice movie theater any time; shop at Target or Kohls or Sam's; drink coffee at four different Starbucks locations; eat at Cheddars or Huck's or Texas Roadhouse; and if I couldn't find what I wanted in Sherman, well, Dallas was 40 minutes away (plus 2 hours and 30 minutes for traffic). Not to mention that I also have family in Sherman, and I miss them very much.

So, what gives?

Well, for me there was always the personal connection. I was born and mostly raised here, my grandfather owned a business on Main Street, and my daughter lives right close by. I also have many friends here. Truth be told, outside of work, I didn't have fistfuls of friends in Sherman. (I could always overlook that fact by spending lots of money on cool stuff.)

In the fall of 2005 I found myself passing through town, driving out along the lake, and strolling through some of my old haunts - and it hit me. I not only wanted to move back to Arkadelphia, I knew I was going to move back to Arkadelphia. I did not know how or when or why, but in the back of my mind, I knew it.

Most people aren't going to have that same feeling, though. So, what's right about Arkadelphia? What appealed to me that might appeal to them?

First of all, this is a beautiful town. You know this, but it's true. Arkadelphia is beautiful. It has so much of what so many towns don't have. Hills. Trees. Running water (non-manmade). A great walking trail. DeGray Lake. Stately homes. Zero pollution. Quiet, tree-lined streets. It's a town that hasn't been made from scratch overnight; it's been around for a long time, it has a history. You can feel it when you walk down the street. As far as natural beauty, Arkadelphia has more than any other city in this region.

Also, Arkadelphia has two universities. Henderson and Ouachita are like second

homes to me. They have tremendous resources, are physically beautiful, and have brought a diverse range of people into the community, from the professors to the students. You can start a whole new phase of your professional or intellectual life right here.

Then there's the people. Like I said, I have friends here, and I have grown to respect them even more over the years because, frankly, I've spent a lot of time around a lot of really unpleasant people elsewhere. I'm serious. Crazy, unreasonable, mean, selfish, egotistical people. I don't know anybody like that in Arkadelphia. Don't plan on meeting any.

I could go on. One thing I won't mention is the ease of access to OTHER CITIES like so-and-so and so-and-so. That is irrelevant. Let's talk about Arkadelphia.

One of the most noticeable things is this growing sense of urgency that something needs to happen. We call it "growth," but to me, "growth" still means uncontrollable traffic, overpriced homes built too quickly, crime, road rage, and just too many darn people competing for the same two inches of space.

So I don't think we really mean growth. I think we really mean "change." A change in thinking, in attitude, in how we approach and enjoy life. Getting away from tried-and-true (?) politics. Mixing our established way of life with what's new and different. What Arkadelphia needs most is change - positive, progressive change.

Maybe it starts with our government. Maybe it starts in the school system. Maybe it starts with our builders and developers. Maybe it starts in our homes, with our kids. Maybe it starts with this newspaper. Maybe it starts everywhere at once.

Change is scary. Change takes work. I think Arkadelphia is up to the task - as long as everyone realizes that sometimes change is painful, too.

Arkadelphia is a good town. Hey, I wouldn't be here if it weren't, and you wouldn't be, either. But we're all starting to stretch our legs and ask questions and wonder if maybe things can't be better.

They can be. Arkadelphia can be whatever we make of it.

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