



For Immediate Release

Contact Tim Allen, 479-783-3111 / tallen@fortsmithchamber.com

Chamber Finalizes Major Investment for Workforce Development

FORT SMITH, Ark. (October 4, 2018) — The Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce has announced it will share a \$1.3 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation for a focus on expanding workforce initiatives in the area. The grant will be split equally between the Northwest Arkansas Council and the Fort Smith Chamber and the funds will become part of the expanding effort to build a regional infrastructure to develop the talent for a variety of career pathways, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare and information technology jobs.

“Simply put, this is huge. For the Walton Family Foundation to recognize both areas and the work we’re doing to develop the workforce of the 21st century is very exciting,” said Tim Allen, President and CEO of the Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce. “As the face of business and industry continues to evolve, Fort Smith business leaders are leading the way to build the workforce we need.”

The Fort Smith Chamber has been working closely with the Fort Smith Public School System and the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, as well as area businesses, to build a coalition that can focus on developing the talent and workforce to fulfill the area’s current job requirements but also position Fort Smith at the forefront of future workforce needs. And the effort is being recognized at the state and national level.

“To stay competitive in the changing economy, we must build a highly skilled workforce with the training that employers require,” remarked Trent Goins, Chairperson, Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. “This effort will help to bridge gaps so that our workers can develop the skill set they need to advance their career plans and businesses can find employees with the right skills.”

“As our economy evolves, we need to ensure that our state’s workforce has the skills required to compete – and win,” said Arkansas Economic Development Commission Executive Director Mike Preston. “At AEDC, our mission is to bring the best and highest paying jobs to Arkansas, and that means we need a skilled workforce. I applaud Fort Smith and the Northwest Arkansas Council for coming together to work toward a viable solution. This grant from the Walton Family Foundation will go a long way to fund initiatives that will help ensure that Fort Smith remains competitive for future new and expanding projects.”

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