



## 2018 Annual Meeting

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**For Immediate Release.**

Fort Smith Convention Center, Thursday, October 25, 2018. The Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Meeting with over 600 people in attendance at the Fort Smith Convention Center today. Trent Goins, President & CEO of OK Foods and Chairman of the Fort Smith Regional Chamber's Board of Directors, led the program. The Fort Smith Regional Chamber welcomed Governor Asa Hutchinson to its 2018 Annual Meeting as the keynote speaker. Governor Hutchinson gave an impassioned presentation about the Fort Smith region's economic development successes and other regional accomplishments. The event allowed the Chamber to bring its member businesses and organizations together to highlight the past year's events as well as reflecting on the economic development created through the Chamber's collaborative partnerships with its members, government agencies, and educational institutions.

The Chamber used this opportunity to present findings from a commissioned Workforce Development study produced by Ted Abernathy of Economic Leadership LLC. Tim Allen, President and CEO of the Fort Smith Regional Chamber, shared the results of the study with the audience to highlight the need for more comprehensive and future-forward training in our region. Allen said, "We must prepare our community for the 21st Century Workforce in order to remain competitive in attracting and retaining quality companies to this entire region." He also revealed exciting news during the event with the announcement that Chamber will invest \$500,000 in Workforce Development.

This investment along with the recent grant award from the Walton Family Foundation and the Fort Smith Public School's millage funds will help to create a legacy of workforce training in the Fort Smith, MSA. With this financial commitment, the search is underway for a new position at the Chamber for the Vice President of Workforce Development. The goal is to have the position filled by early 2019. The entities partnering for this bold plan will work to strengthen opportunities for area students to choose career opportunities in advanced manufacturing, health care and information technology.

Governor Hutchinson talked about the goals he hopes to attain in his second term with economic development taking priority in his focus. The Governor agreed with the Chamber that its workforce initiative is important to our region and the state, and he spoke to his commitment to this community's effort of creating highly skilled workers with diverse training opportunities. The Chamber looks forward to steering job skill development in partnership with the Governor, the University of Arkansas Fort Smith, Fort Smith Public Schools, and regional industry.

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10/25/2018