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We've Got It Good in Searcy, AR: A Community Profile, Second Edition

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*We've got
it good...*

in

SEARCY

ARKANSAS

A Community Profile

by

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Private Enterprise Education
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A
Commemorative Issue
of
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INTRODUCTION – A Moving Experience

When this writer moved to Searcy from South Texas 22 years ago, the local realtor provided this sage advice, "*Once you become a Searcian, you can never leave.*" At that time, I didn't know what he meant. Now, as this publication goes through its latest metamorphosis spanning nearly a quarter century, I know what the realtor meant.

The writing and rewriting of this comprehensive digest may never end, due to all the dynamic changes that necessitate a new edition every few years. It is truly a labor of love -- a perpetually "*unfinished symphony*" that has sold me on Searcy for the duration. What a pleasure it has been over the past two decades to get to meet and know so many of Searcy's civic and business leaders!

A colleague of mine loves to remark, "*Here, thousands live as millions wish they could.*" Alas, having also lived for 24 years in a county of 13 million people, Los Angeles, I can only reply, "*Amen to that!*"

This prototype booklet has become a relevant, practical and interesting experience for me and, at the same time, it helps Searcy by providing a thorough but condensed course of city information available to business and industry, individuals and families considering Searcy as a possible site for location and home.

For additional detailed information, data, and annotated reference sources, the reader is referred to the author's 210 page book, Locating in Searcy, Arkansas--Facts for Business and Industry, Individuals and Families, 4th edition, 1987. Limited quantities are available at the Searcy Chamber of Commerce office and at area libraries.

Because of the unique relationship between our wonderful community and Harding University, "***We've Got It Good in SEARCY, ARKANSAS--A Community Profile***" is one of the many positive things that have happened along the way to bring Searcy and Harding University closer together.

This new informational guide can be a significant factor in recruiting a proper mix of people and industry necessary to move Searcy forward as a thriving rural center of commerce and agribusiness. I commend all involved to commit themselves to such a mandate.

I. The Natural State

Arkansas is an ideal spot in our great land. The migration from frost belt to sun belt, and the economic emergence of the southern tier of states, have thrust Arkansas into the middle of today's action. The labor force, a key indicator, is increasing 30% faster than the national average.

Fifty percent of the U.S. population is within a 550 mile radius of the borders of Arkansas. Last year, Arkansas significantly outpaced the nation and was among the top ten states nationally for percentage increases in output, employment and personal income.

Business is good in Arkansas, and it will get better as new jobs create new needs, which, in turn, create more new jobs. Such are the makings of real opportunities. The composite Arkansan appreciates the opportunity to have a good job and to keep it.

The Arkansas worker wants to help his company grow, and quality-consciousness is a way of life. According to companies with multi-state operations, the Arkansan will have less absenteeism and more productivity than his counterparts almost anywhere else.

Among the nation's 48 contiguous states, Arkansas' business climate usually ranks high in the South Central region and nationally in annual studies conducted by Grant Thornton Accountants and the Management Consultants, an international firm of Certified Public Accountants.

With exports and foreign investments accounting for 13 percent of the Gross State Product, and over 50,000 jobs for Arkansas, it is clear that our business links to the world are something we cannot ignore. There are 18 businesses in White County which export goods overseas.

Entertainment, culture, and community activities are alive and well in Arkansas. From opera to bluegrass to nationally ranked football and basketball teams, from Ozark native art festivals to elegant, candlelight dining, there is plenty to entertain and enlighten Arkansans the year around.

II. Tax Base and Income

Here, industry receives a handshake, not a shake down. From a corporate and individual standpoint, taxes in Arkansas are among the lowest in the nation. State and local governments have aided the era of industrialization by providing incentives on the one hand, while exercising tight fiscal controls on the other hand.

A study of tax and fee policy, along with a conservative approach to tax increases, shows that the tax climate in Searcy is favorable and a desirable attribute for locating in the city. Specifically, there is a 4.5% state sales tax, a 1% county sales tax, a corporate income tax of 6.5% of net income in excess of \$100,000 and a 34 mills real estate tax (based on 20% of assessed value).

White County per capita pre-tax income typically is about 90% of the state average, or 70% of the national average. However, after adjusting for comparative living costs and taxes of all types, some of the seemingly affluent states slip toward the bottom of the list, according to two separate estimates of relative purchasing power.

The average Arkansan then has an adjusted per capita income higher than the citizens of seven Midwestern and Northeastern states: Rhode Island, Kentucky, North Dakota, South Dakota, Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, and Maine, respectively.

The average annual growth of per capita personal income over the past decade was about 8%, equalling the state and national average. Nine percent of Americans receive food stamps. In Arkansas, the share is 13.4% of the population. Mississippi ranks the highest with 20% of the population, and Wyoming ranks the lowest with 3.5% of the population receiving food stamps.

Like a developing country, the south has reached the "take-off" stage of its economic growth. The south has been an under-developed region in the past, but it is catching up; it has a better growth potential than any other region of the country.

III. Our Town

Searcy, Arkansas, is a thriving trade center of commerce and agribusiness. The economy of Searcy works because White Countians work hard. The composite White Countian appreciates the opportunity to have a good job and to hold it. He wants to help his company grow; quality consciousness is a way of life.

Searcy is a likely areas of the state for future commercial development. Connected to Little Rock, the state's economic nerve center, by 50 miles of super highway, Searcy is increasingly becoming a bedroom community for Little Rock. The state of Arkansas has a "Free Port" law, which applies to finished inventories maintained by manufacturers located within the state and stored in warehouses in transit through Arkansas to destinations outside the state.

Situated at the "*Buckle of the Sunbelt*," Searcy, Arkansas, is benefiting from the northeast-to-southwest shift of population in the United States. Location and climate, economic as well as natural, have combined to position Arkansas at the right place at the right time. Recently, the City Council passed a resolution to allow an Enterprise Zone to be activated in the city.

Searcy's gift to Arkansas is our "*Holiday of Lights*." The White County Courthouse and the surrounding grounds are trimmed in tiny white lights; the accented beautiful historic structure is the center stage of events for a month-long festival. Parks, stores, and homes throughout our community reach deep into their hearts to bring out the spirit of the season with decorative displays all over town. People come from all over Arkansas to enjoy the sights and play a part in White County's Holiday Season.

Two AM and FM radio stations are located in Searcy: KWCK--1300 AM/KSER--99.3 FM and KAPZ--710 AM/KKSY--107.1 FM. Searcy is also served by three television stations out of Little Rock and an even broader menu of 24 additional stations through cable TV.

Two daily newspapers are available. *The Daily Citizen*, oldest west of the Mississippi, is printed in the city of Searcy. *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* is an excellent statewide publication.

There are 40 churches in Searcy offering a variety of religious beliefs. There are also 80 different civic, professional, and interest groups.

IV. Infrastructure

The Searcy Municipal Airport, recognized by the FAA as the "Outstanding Arkansas Airport for 1993," offers ambulance, air freight, charters, flight training, maintenance, rentals, sightseeing, and storage. There is a 5,000 ft. lighted runway and an instrument approach to the airport. An average of 50 planes use the Searcy Airport daily. Searcy is serviced by commercial air flights into Little Rock, 52 miles south.

Searcy is located three miles from the junction of U.S. 67 (interstate expressway) and U.S. 64 (east-west highway). These are modern concrete highways. Little Rock, St. Louis, and Dallas are directly accessible on U.S. 67. Memphis, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City are reached via U.S. 64. U.S. Highways 64 and 67 actually bypass Searcy, and this has eliminated through traffic and reduced accidents and noise. New east-west bypasses are also under construction.

The four-lane interstate provides three major access roads into Searcy. Of special significance are the center exit and ramps which permit direct access into the Industrial Park without driving through the city itself. The interstate expressway connects Searcy with Interstate Expressway 30 and 40. Taxi service is provided by the Searcy Cab Company. Twenty-four hour transportation is provided in or out of town. These cabs are dispatched by telephone and can also be reached through the mobile operator.

Searcy is served by a complete rail system for freight transportation through a local company--the Doniphan, Kensett, and Searcy Railroad. There are 5.5 miles of track which connect 4 miles east with the Missouri Pacific Railroad's main line at Kensett, Arkansas. Fifteen major trucking firms provide service to Searcy. Rate schedules are available upon request with most trucking services offering overnight service to major points within a 400-mile radius of Searcy. There are 11 different warehousing facilities in Searcy.

Searcy has two fire stations, several modern pumper fire apparatus generators for emergency use, and a snorkel truck with a 55 foot boom. There are currently 450 fire hydrants in the Searcy area; all are looped water mains to provide for maximum water flow. Searcy maintains an excellent Class 4 insurance rating. Searcy's new sewer treatment plant has doubled the capacity of its predecessor.

V. Progressive Leadership

In any community, the question is often asked, "*What does the Chamber of Commerce do?*" There are those who believe the Chamber gathers statistics, prints attractive brochures, answers inquiries, and advertises "*what a great place this community is to work, live, and enjoy life.*" The Chamber does all those things.

All of those jobs are important, but they aren't the reasons the Chamber exists. They are "*fringe benefits*" of the Chamber--the things the Chamber does as a matter of course, because those jobs need doing--and the Chamber is good at them. There is one main reason for the Chamber to exist: to do whatever is necessary to keep the area's economic condition at a level where businesses will risk their resources here in hope of making a profit. Everything else is just frosting on the cake--a means to the end.

Here, as in any other city, the profitable operations of business is the source of all other benefits. Only by succeeding in this fundamental goal, can the Chamber provide the jobs and produce the wealth to finance all the governmental, civic, educational, cultural and charitable needs that a city is faced with every day.

The Searcy Chamber of Commerce is a catalyst--a common vehicle through which business and professional people work together for the corporate good of the community. Accordingly, the Searcy Chamber Board recently developed a Five-Year Master Plan of 24 goals to promote sound economic growth for business and agriculture, along with efforts to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for all residents.

The Searcy Chamber's Leadership Institute identifies and motivates potential leaders; acquaints them with community needs, problems and opportunities; offers a forum of exchange of alternative methods for dealing with those needs, problems and opportunities; and challenges potential leaders with community involvement and decision-making.

In the past four years, the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission has sponsored 23 "*Quality First*" programs in Searcy. Over 400 *Quality Management* students have graduated, representing 60 companies and yielding \$15 million in savings to local businesses. Searcy's pioneering "*Quality First*" program is a model for others in the Mid-South.

VI. Industrial Development

A program of civic development has been sparked by the enthusiastic support of the Searcy Chamber of Commerce. Industry has been attracted to the city by its progressiveness and interest which is evidenced by financial support of new industry through the Searcy Industrial Development Corporation.

The Searcy Industrial Development Corporation (S.I.D.C.) is a legally organized corporation sponsored by the Searcy Chamber of Commerce. The S.I.D.C. works with the Industrial Development Committee of the Searcy Chamber of Commerce in providing information for industrial prospects to help them arrive at a decision as to whether or not to locate in Searcy.

The established industries in Searcy are prospering. The Searcy success formula has been $SL + CCC = GP$; meaning, *Sound Leadership plus Concerned Cooperative Citizens equal Growth and Progress.*

When an individual industry decides to locate in Searcy, the S.I.D.C. is responsible for all legal aspects of any agreement between the industry and the Chamber of Commerce, city, or private individual who may be selling land for use by the industry.

The S.I.D.C. may purchase, lease, rent, or sell and receive bequests or donations of real or personal property. It has the power to make contracts, borrow money, issue bonds, and loan money required in the establishment or expansion of an industry within the city. Financing for the new industries is available through issuance of Act 9 and Act 49 bonds.

Numerous industrial sites are available for approximately \$10,000 per acre. Construction costs are approximately \$33 per square foot. Average lease cost per square foot is \$4.50 to \$6.50. Available in the Industrial Park is a 12-inch water line, a 15-inch sewer line, and electric primary lines which run from Arkansas Power & Light Company Sub-station. Gas lines and railroad sidings are also available.

Future growth into the mid-south will probably come from the continued migration of manufacturing, and private-service industries to take advantage of our region's relatively lower wages, taxes, energy costs, land costs, and mild climate. The national population is also expected to increase most rapidly in our region.

VII. Economic Progress

My best information on economic development comes from the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, The Arkansas State Chamber, and Arkansas Power and Light. *"Economic development"* may be the most commonly discussed, but least understood, issue of this decade. As the AIDC has pointed out, we all want economic development. Without it, our children move away, our towns die, and roads deteriorate.

The first step in the economic development process begins with the local community. The AIDC is correct in reminding us that no federal or state government program, however well-meaning or well-planned, can be effective in economic development without the initial commitment and efforts of the local community to the creation and maintenance of jobs.

AP&L is correct in noting that many factors enter into the fight for industry: Labor force (including skills of employees and the wages they will demand)...Transportation...Proximity to customers and raw materials...a business climate that makes it easy to operate...energy costs...and availability of existing "spec" buildings for prospects.

Neighboring states are redoubling their efforts in industrial recruitment. To meet that competition, Arkansas must keep the incentives to attract and retain industry: (1) The tax credit, (2) those enterprise zones, (3) continued infrastructure development, and (4) more quality management training.

Continued economic and industrial growth is vital to the quality of life in our state and for the future of our children. Therefore, AP&L announced four years ago their program, *"Teamwork Arkansas"*--a five-year, \$10-15 million commitment to creating more jobs for the state. *"Teamwork Arkansas"* represents a coordinated private sector commitment to support public efforts through a five-year plan to address specific goals and needs in the areas of industrial prospecting, community development, and national advertising and public relations.

Yes, economic development may begin with the local community, but it cannot end there. As the AIDC points out, it no longer adequate to just be a *"nice place to live."* But it is a good start, for sure.

VIII. Manufacturing

Many people believe that the manufacturing sector is becoming less important to the Arkansas economy. Actually, just the opposite is true. Manufacturing is very important to Arkansas as a generator of jobs and income. Does that make Arkansas more or less vulnerable to a recession?

Regarding manufacturing intensity--we are 9th in nation. That may seem to make us more vulnerable to swings in the business cycle. But we are diversified into recession-resistant industries. They tend to be less vulnerable. Arkansas' excellent performance in 1991 (jobs, output and personal income gains, etc.) proves that. Our largest manufacturing employer is in food processing, the paragon of recession-resistant industries.

Searcy's industry is diversified. Today, Searcy is a distribution center for the nation's largest discount chains; it is the home of one of the Mid South's best-known ice creams. Searcy-made sinks, dryers, pumps, valves, bronze plaques, frozen foods, fast food containers, leather products, rollers, feeds, and other articles are shipped to distant corners of the world.

Over half the employees in manufacturing in Arkansas live in communities with a population of less than 2,500. The personal income derived from manufacturing has a great impact.

According to the Arkansas State Chamber, for every 100 new manufacturing jobs created in a community, 64 non-manufacturing jobs are created: 45 jobs in wholesale and retail, entertainment and recreation; 7 jobs in transportation; 3 in finance, insurance and real estate; 3 in repairs and services; 3 in construction; and 3 in public administration.

Without these payrolls, says the AIDC, many communities would face difficult economic times. The local and state tax bases would erode, leading to declining services and fewer educational opportunities. The impact of manufacturing jobs in Arkansas is highly significant when total earnings are examined.

All manufacturing employees earn about \$5 billion; \$3 billion went into small towns, as 60 percent of our manufacturing workers come from small towns. It's fair to assume that without these paychecks, many small towns would languish and lose population.

IX. Retail Sector

There are many reasons for doing business in Searcy. The many business firms have been so enthusiastic and supportive of Searcy that they united in a "Shop in Searcy" campaign. Most shoppers' needs can be fulfilled in Searcy. By doing business in our own community, the sales tax dollars come back to the city and help maintain the many services.

Shoppers are friends and neighbors to local business people. Businesses support the activities which interest the public. Shoppers receive personal attention and courteous service. Shopping is easy, comfortable, and safe in Searcy. One can save time and money when buying here. The local business people are reliable and dependable. Consumers find great selection and variety of services in Searcy stores:

Convenient shopping facilities accessible to a large trade area...a large array of fabrics...men's clothing, ladies' ready-to-wear and children's shops...cosmetics and cosmetologists...fine shoe stores...department stores and discount houses providing thousands of items and nationally known brands...jewelry stores with exquisite gems, watches along with crystal and silver...professional florists...supermarkets open 24 hours a day...appliance stores with televisions, computers, video equipment and VCR's...modern machinery and equipment for farm and home...automobile dealers with excellent new and used car bargains...automotive and farm implement parts, and skilled mechanics and technicians.

Nine excellent commercial banks serve the financial needs of White County. Most of these institutions have branch offices as well. First Security Bank and First National Bank, both longtime, full-service Searcy financial institutions, are consistently ranked extremely high by bank rating services.

There are about 40 restaurants located within the city limits of Searcy. Restaurants in Searcy are predominately the fast food variety, although there are at least one dozen full service restaurants. There are five facilities which are capable of handling meetings or banquets arranging up to as many as 1000 people, in the case of the Harding University Cafeteria.

X. Labor Force Demographics

With a county population of 54,676, and going up 1% per year, there are 20,103 people in our White County labor market. Its composition is about 59% male and 41% female. Average hourly manufacturing wage in 1990 was \$7.90. White County unemployment rates are typically about 1% above the State of Arkansas rate--an attractive feature for prospective employers.

Sixty percent of White County is classified as rural. The population of 54,676 makes it the 10th largest county in the state. The County Seat, Searcy, has the largest population in the county, with 15,180 residents. The civilian labor force is growing about 3% a year.

Seventy-five percent of new jobs created each year are from existing industry expansions, according to The Fantus Database developed for the Searcy Chamber. A commuting pattern survey of representatives of Searcy employees shows that 78% travel 10 miles or less to work, and over 50% travel only 5 miles.

By occupational categories, Managerial/Professional comprise 18% of the total employment picture. Sales/Technical/Administrative comprise 25%. Service occupations employ 13.6%. Precision/production/craft/repair employ 16.1%. Operators/fabricators/laborers round out the final 27.4% of the White County labor force.

White Countians are employed in various industries in the following percentages: Agriculture (6.5), Mining (.02), Construction (8.3), Manufacturing (23.7), Transportation/Communication/Utilities (6.0), Wholesale Trade (17.5), Financial/Insurance/Real Estate (3.2), Services (27.3) and Public Administration (2.4).

There are very few labor organizations in White County, and with that is a nearly non-existent record of strike history. Arkansas is one of 20 states which has passed the Right to Work Law.

Among this nation's 50 states, the 20 which ban compulsory unionism continue to out-distance the 30 states which do not have Right to Work Laws, in the creation of new manufacturing jobs, non-agriculture jobs, and contract construction employment.

XI. Private Educational Institutions

Harding University in Searcy enrolls about 3300 students from 50 states and 30 foreign countries. Harding is a Christian, liberal arts, co-educational senior university located on 200 acres of land and has 46 buildings. Harding attempts to be non-sectarian in spirit and practice. It desires to admit students who are academically capable, who have high character, and who accept the aims and objectives of the University.

Harding University is a high-demand university that has been listed in recent issues of three national directories: *Peterson's Guide to Competitive Colleges*, *Best Dollar Values in American Colleges*, and *200 Most Selective Colleges*.

More than 50 undergraduate majors with numerous sequences of specialization are offered at Harding University. There are several masters degrees and pre-professional programs also available. Evening continuing education and professional development classes are available along with summer courses. There is also a branch campus in Florence, Italy.

The nationally recognized and award winning American Studies Institute supplements the curriculum of the university with educationally beneficial presentations by internationally known authorities. Harding University's Business and Economics Teams have frequently and repeatedly won national competitions.

Guests of the American Studies Institute Conference Center can attend sessions in the 500-seat Heritage Auditorium or in one of five multi-purpose rooms. Banquet rooms are designed to accommodate groups ranging from 100 to 1000. Located in the same building, the Heritage Inn provides 100 guests with easily accessible lodging during their visit to Harding.

Harding Academy is a private Christian school for students in Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade. Harding Academy has received the highest accreditation possible in the state of Arkansas, with both the high school and the elementary school accredited by the state of Arkansas and the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges.

Harding Academy enrolls 400 students each year with increasing numbers coming from surrounding communities. Boarding facilities are provided for a limited number of students in grades 9-12.

XII. Economic Impact

Harding University itself, and the students themselves, provide a significant percentage of consumer spending in Searcy and White County. The 3,250 students (an average of the Fall and Spring enrollments) now spend locally an average of \$1,000 each per year, totaling \$3.25 million. Approximately 1,900 students drive cars.

Economic base multipliers can run as low as 1.2 or as high as 7.0, depending on a community's structure and size. A conservative multiplier estimate would be 4.0. Therefore, a reasonable extrapolation would indicate that Harding University student expenditures have the purchasing power impact of \$13 million, as each dollar changes hands approximately four times.

To assist the students in meeting the cost of private education, Harding University employs 1000 students on a part time basis, annually spending \$1.2 million in the Student Work Program (20 years ago, that figure was approximately \$100,000). Harding University also has 600 full time employees and a \$13.4 million annual payroll.

The 1992-93 budget of Harding University is \$41.6 million. Applying the same multiplier, remembering that the total budget does include the \$13.4 million payroll--and factoring in average student expenditures--a conservative estimate is that the campus generates approximately \$200 million a year for the general economy.

Not included in the above estimates (except by factoring in a conservative multiplier constant) are offsetting factors--local revenue generated by visitors at major Harding functions (for example, one local restaurant manager recently reported a 50% increase in revenue during the three-day Spring Sing Weekend) and conversely, individual and institutional expenditures which would not be classified as "local-purchase."

However, there are other ways that a university campus has economic impact on its region, such as assisting local industries. The Harding University campus increases the area's attractiveness, by making available a supply of well-trained people, cultural amenities, etc. Former "Star Search" Male Vocalist Champion David Slater is a Harding University Graduate.

XIII. Public Schools

The County Public School System is composed of 27 separate schools distributed in 11 cities, with each possessing a complete educational system. Searcy has the largest enrollment in the county. The Searcy Special School District is made up of six schools, employing 275 persons and has a total enrollment of nearly 3,400 students.

All Searcy schools are fully accredited by the State Department of Education. The Searcy schools consistently and significantly score above the national average on normed tests. The student/teacher ratio is 17/1. Ninety percent of high school students graduate and 80% go on to some form of post-secondary education or training.

Searcy High School Vocational Program offerings are available to students in the last three grade levels (10-11-12). Introductory skill level programs are primarily available to sophomores. The more technical and advanced skill development offerings are made available to junior and senior level students. Searcy Public Schools, each year, offer a number of adult education evening programs for citizens in the area.

Sunshine School and the White County Sheltered Workshop provide the bulk of services to the mentally and developmentally handicapped. Assisting the handicapped from infancy through adulthood is the overall aim of these programs which prepare the students to be contributing citizens of the community.

The Foothills Technical Institute in Searcy offers complete facilities consisting of the latest equipment and teaching aids. New equipment is added periodically to keep up-to-date in each area. The school does not guarantee employment, but does work closely with employers and the Employment Security Division. Jobs are usually available for graduates. The Institute offers both day and night courses.

Arkansas State University and Technical Institute in Beebe, 20 miles South of Searcy, has approximately 2000 part-time and full time students. Most students are candidates for the Associate of Arts degree, with emphasis in Agriculture, Animal Science, Art, Biological Science, Business and Commerce Technology, Business and Management, Liberal Arts, Mathematics, and Speech and Theater.

XIV. Agribusiness

In Arkansas, agribusiness is big business. Each year, Arkansas leads the nation in production and exportation of both rice and commercial broiler chickens. Although there are big operations in agribusiness, the individual farmer still plays a key role.

Literally thousands of Arkansas farmers grow commodities on contract for major companies; thus, avoiding the economic pressures that have forced most of their counterparts off the land they love.

In White County, soybeans and rice occupy the most land and produce the most revenue of all the farm crops. White County ranks first in the state in both squash and strawberry production and second in poultry in the state. White County ranks fifth in beef production.

White County is the second largest county in the state in land area with 666,496 acres. White County topography is unique. The eastern one-third of the land in the county is rich, flat alluvial and terrace bottomland.

The western two-thirds of the land area lies along the edge of the gentle, rolling Ozark foothills. This land grows lush pasture and has clear streams which supply excellent conditions for poultry and livestock production.

Agribusiness is probably one of the more important industries in White County. Although agribusiness is a large employer of many White County residents, it is also a stimulant to the economy.

Agriculture is changing. In the last half decade, beef cattle, rice, soybeans, table grapes, and commercial egg production enterprises have expanded rapidly. At the same time, cotton, dairying, and strawberry enterprises have been on the decline.

At the east border of White County, and 80 miles west of Memphis Tennessee, is the White River. Navigation on this river is possible on a year-round basis. The White River connects with the Arkansas, Mississippi, and the Ohio inland water systems. At Augusta, which is 24 miles east of Searcy, grain and soybeans are exported on the White River. Forest products are also being exported via this river.

XV. Public Sector

The city of Searcy uses a Mayor-Council form of government. The government of White County is administered by the Quorum Court, the county's elected officials. The current state constitution provides for the traditional executive, legislative, and judicial type government. Over three dozen federal, state, and local government offices are headquartered in Searcy, Arkansas. The White County Courthouse is the oldest active courthouse west of the Mississippi River.

Searcy is a regional health care center. The Medical complexes offer the latest technological advances. With two hospitals, two large clinics, numerous other small clinics, and a Radiation Therapy Institute, Searcy continues to attract very fine physicians.

White County health manpower professionals include 50 physicians, 20 dentists, 190 registered nurses, and 7 veterinarians. The Public Health Department also provides a broad menu of services.

A wide range of medical and surgical services are available in Searcy: including special services such as cancer treatment, women's care, same-day surgical services, spine surgery, laser surgery, sports medicine, 24-hour emergency service with physicians on staff, home health services, a rehab center, hemodialysis and permanent Magnetic Resonance Image (MRI) equipment. Substance abuse treatment and nursing home facilities are also available.

The number of Arkansans 65 or older represents 14.3 percent of the state's total population. Only Florida has a greater percentage of senior citizens (17.6 percent). The greater Searcy area has a combined 420-bed capacity in three private nursing homes with facilities for caring for elderly persons 24 hours per day.

Three local facilities, Sunshine School, White County Group Homes, and New Hope Specialized Industries, provide the bulk of services to the mentally and developmentally handicapped of the area. The three programs meet the needs of the handicapped from infancy through adulthood. Their overall aim is to prepare the students to be contributing citizens of the community and to live as independently as possible.

XVI. Housing and Recreation

Residential building costs run about \$40 per square foot (heated area, including lot). An average residential lot costs \$10,000. The cost per front foot is \$1,000 for commercial property and \$125 per frontage foot for residential property.

Eighty-two percent of White County's housing stock consists of one family dwellings. One of Searcy's newest and largest sub-divisions is River Oaks, complete with retirement center facilities. There are over 1200 apartments in Searcy consisting of one, two, and three bedrooms, furnished and unfurnished, in multi-unit buildings and town houses.

White County has a large concentration of existing public housing. Ten percent of White County residents live in mobile homes. Traditional public housing units now number more than 400. There are about 400 motel units available for guest occupancy in the Searcy area.

The Searcy Sports Complex became a reality in 1986 with the purchase of 50 acres next to Searcy Industrial Park. Local businesses, industries, and individuals helped finance the construction. The Complex serves at one central location all of Searcy's athletic events. On 50 acres are the following: 12 ball fields, 5 soccer fields, 2 concession stands, and 2 restroom building.

The Carmichael Community Center is a popular recreational facility that is operated throughout the year. Through the Carmichael Community Center and numerous private organizations, a broad array of athletic facilities, courts, and programs are available to the public.

Riverside Park has 47 acres, including 2 covered pavilions, 8 cookout-picnic table setups, restrooms, playground, barrier-free paved trail for wheel chair or elderly, a river overlook, and miles of natural trails. Berryhill Park now includes a lighted walking-jogging trail, picnic areas, playground equipment, a fountain, a baseball field, a pavilion and numerous tennis courts.

All in all, Searcy has two city parks, a large public swimming pool, two golf courses, 10 tennis courts, two miniature golf courses, two bowling alleys, and a five-screen cinema.

XVII. Land and Climate

In the foothills of Arkansas' Ozarks, a half hour's drive from Searcy, lies a land where the harried pace of the city and the humdrum of the work-a-day world are easily forgotten.

As described in area tourism literature, at the foot of beautiful Round Mountain and in the shadow of Sugar Loaf Mountain, stands Greer's Ferry Dam. Behind that structure, dedicated in 1963 by the late President Kennedy, glistens one of the foremost recreational areas in the middle United States, Greer's Ferry Lake.

The paved access roads that lead to the numerous parks are sportsman's roadways to unlimited recreation of his choosing. The parks include drinking water, toilet facilities, boat launching ramps, parking areas, fireplaces, trash containers, tent and trailer spaces, charcoal grills, and picnic tables for the general convenience of everyone. There are also public boat docks which provide boat and motor rental services, fuel, food, and other boating supplies and services.

Arkansas ranks near the top nationally in duck hunting, and White County has excellent duck hunting. White County also ranks near the middle in deer killed for the state. It ranks third in the number of quail killed.

White County is a mixture of hills and flat agricultural areas which account for its hunting versatility. There is outstanding squirrel and rabbit hunting in the hardwood bottomlands. The popular sport of dove hunting is very plentiful due to the abundance of milo and maize on which the dove feed.

The climate of the area around Searcy is classified as a humid sub-tropical climate, characterized by relatively mild temperatures. Rainfall is usually abundant throughout the year, although deficiencies or excesses are especially common during the summer months.

Most precipitation is frontal in origin, occurring along the zone or "front" where two unlike air masses meet. Winters are usually short and mild, but have cold periods of below freezing of a few days' duration. The area has an average frost-free growing season of about 215 days.

THE BOTTOM LINE -- Something for Everyone

Finally, I have been impressed with a brief article in the January, 1991, issue of "City & Town", the official publication of the Arkansas Municipal League. It is entitled "**My Town.**"

My town is the place where my house is found, where my business is located, and where my vote is cast. It is where my children are educated, where my neighbors dwell, and where my life is chiefly lived. It is the home spot for me.

My town has a right to my civic loyalty. It supports me, and I should support it. My town wants my citizenship, not my partisanship; my friendliness, not my dissensions; my sympathy, not my criticism; my intelligence, not my indifference.

My town supplies me with protection, trade, friends, education, schools, churches, and the right to free moral citizenship. It has some things that are better than others. The best things I should seek to make better; the worst things I should work to suppress. Take it all-in-all, it is my town, and it is entitled to the best there is in me.

So, there is plenty to do--something for each and every one of us to do. Then, the coming generations, who will be the true judges of what we do today, will find us worthy of our tasks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Don Diffine is currently Professor of Economics at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, and Director of the Belden Center for Private Enterprise Education. The Senior Research Associate of Harding's American Studies Institute, Dr. Diffine is also the Director of Economics Teams that have won First Place in national Students in Free Enterprise competitions on six occasions.

Listed in the Heritage Foundation's **Guide to Public Policy Experts**, Dr. Diffine is the author of a 200-page **Facts Book for Business and Industry** and is published frequently in the **Journal of Private Enterprise**. He currently has over 90 articles and monographs in print.

Dr. Diffine is the recipient of the Freedoms Foundation George Washington Honor Medal for his article "*All American Economics--Made in the U.S.A.*" He is the editor of the **ENTREPRENEUR**, a journal that has received five Freedoms Foundation awards in the category of Non-profit Publications. In 1990, the National Flag Foundation presented its "*New Constellation Award*" to Dr. Diffine for his booklet, "**TO THE FLAG--Our Banner of Liberty.**"

The recipient of the \$7,500 Freedoms Foundation Principle Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education, Dr. Diffine has received nine other Freedoms Foundation awards in the categories of Economic Education, Public Affairs-Advertising, Public Address, and Published Works. He is also the faculty winner of a \$1,000 First Place prize in a National Essay contest judged by Nobel Economist Milton Friedman.

In 1988, the first annual Distinguished Scholar Award was presented to Dr. Diffine by the Association of Private Enterprise Education. He is listed in **Personalities of the South** and **Outstanding Educators of America**. The Wal-Mart Foundation has designated him as a Samuel Moore Walton Free Enterprise Fellow.

Dr. Diffine has provided Congressional testimony on business problems, economic impact statements, and inflation-recession dilemmas. A member of the International Platform Association and also an economic humorist, he is a frequent speaker for conventions, management clubs, stockholders' meetings, trade associations, and chambers of commerce.

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