



FRIENDS Foundation

Summary & Successes – Updated 2023

Summary

FRIENDS is an acronym for Funding Retention and Increasing Efforts for Notable economic Development in Sevier County. The 501(c)(3) foundation was established in June of 2020. The FRIENDS foundation was established to accomplish economic and community development goals for Sevier County, Arkansas. This organization is intended to provide an outlet for community partners to participate in economic growth initiatives and projects managed by the Sevier County Director of Economic Development. Funding provided to this organization will be used for salary and benefits paid to the Director of Economic Development, site selection initiatives, training and networking opportunities, community outreach, business retention and expansion, and various projects that relate to economic growth for Sevier County.

This foundation was established to provide opportunities for community partners to make tax-deductible donations to support community and economic development projects in Sevier County. Donations will be used to create a sustainable budget that will allow the department to achieve goals and continue to support the growth of Sevier County.

Mission

FRIENDS' mission is to provide an outlet for community partners to participate in economic growth initiatives and projects managed by the Sevier County Director of Economic Development.

Successes

- Established an economic development department with a director for Sevier County
- Funded a hotel feasibility study for De Queen
- Applied/received \$1 million SBA Community Navigator Pilot Program grant through a partnership with UA Cossatot, the City of De Queen, the Sevier County Chamber of Commerce, the Sevier County UA Extension Office, and CADC
- Funded hospitality training for tourism businesses in Sevier County (free to businesses)
- Established an annual Global Entrepreneurship Week interview series with local business owners to share Sevier County stories and encourage entrepreneurship.



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- Established a team to achieve ACT Work Ready Community designation for Sevier County (designation awarded April 2023)
- Established an opportunity zone fund for the O.Z. designated in De Queen
- Developing the first Sevier County-specific Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
- Coordinating a regional partnership for a solar project to benefit Sevier County, the City of De Queen, Sevier County Medical Center, De Queen Public Schools, and Pilgrim's Pride
- Established a Small Business Office Space with free office, computer, and printer use for Sevier County entrepreneurs (located on UA Cossatot De Queen campus)
- Applied/received Arkansas State EDA grant on behalf of De Queen Industrial Park Public Facilities Board to analyze De Queen Industrial Park property and work toward making the site shovel-ready.
- Working with Arkansas Economic Development Commission to achieve Competitive Community designation for Sevier County (designation spurs state recognition and prioritizes business recruitment to Sevier County industrial sites over other areas of the state)
- Funded one-on-one meetings for Sevier County businesses with Google analytics experts to train local entrepreneurs on search engine utilization to grow online engagement for businesses.
- Funded cybersecurity analysis and training for small businesses on an individual basis to provide education and virtual strengthening of business information.
- Funded individual business efficiency consultations with a certified small business consultant to provide insight on cost reductions and efficiency.