



The City of Van Buren has found a way to bring its past into the present and make it something that future generations can enjoy, as well. Recognized as one of the state's oldest cities, the vibrant town capitalizes on its unique location, historic charm, and diverse industries, making it a popular place to live, work, play and visit!

No where is the blend of old and new more evident than in downtown Van Buren. Iconic buildings, which have served as the backdrops for many feature films, line Main Street. These unique structures have been repurposed into modern shops, dining establishments, offices, and more. Three new restaurants will open in the coming months, adding to the eclectic mix of eateries and coffee shops in the area. A new food truck court is in the works near the historic Frisco Depot. The Center for Art and Education (CAE) has begun the process of renovating property next to the legendary King Opera House. Upon opening, CAE will offer a beautiful gallery and venue space for hosting special events.

Last summer, Van Buren completed construction on its highly anticipated Freedom Park. The space includes two large pavilions, which house the Farmer's Market and other community functions. The amphitheater routinely hosts free outdoor movies and concerts. Children flock daily to the popular star-shaped water feature, which provides a free splash pad experience during the hot summer months. An official grand opening will soon be held for the nearby Veterans Park, which honors those who have served in the military. Recent grants have also helped transform the sidewalks and landscaping along Main Street. Several stores boast "parklets," creating an even more inviting atmosphere in downtown. Visitors can also hop aboard the vintage trolley car and ride to one of the city's many historic gems including the University of Arkansas' Drennen-Scott House and Wilhauf House.

Well-established partnerships are also paving the way for continued growth. The Van Buren School District works closely with the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to enhance students' overall experience and establish a well-trained future workforce. High schoolers can interact with influential business and civic leaders through the Chamber's monthly educational lunch series. The organization also coordinates Arkansas Scholars, which promotes academic achievement, attendance, and other valuable work-related skills, as well as helps graduates earn scholarship dollars. Students can learn about skilled-trades through the state chamber's "Be Pro. Be Proud." initiative. VBSD students can also earn hours, certifications, and degrees through concurrent credit programs with Arkansas Tech University-Ozark and the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith.

In addition to VBSD's close ties with the Chamber, the District collaborates with city leaders to plan for future growth. Construction will soon begin on a new elementary school. Renovations are also taking place at several campuses, including a complete remodeling of the Van Buren High School cafeteria and track facility. The District partnered with the city for a grant to fund new walking/exercise trails at several campuses. VBSD has also been recognized for its

award-winning gardening program. National FoodCorps volunteers get kids in the garden, educating them about the nutritional and financial value of growing their own food. Such initiatives go hand-in-hand with the city's efforts to encourage healthy living. New sidewalks can be seen throughout neighborhoods and walking trails have been added along the riverfront. A progressive parks and trails plan also calls for additional investments into recreational sites.

Van Buren's unique location has benefitted its industries since the town's incorporation in 1845. Situated on the Arkansas River and on the state border with Oklahoma, the town offers corporations vast transport options. Millions of pounds of freight are shipped annually along the river into the Port of Van Buren, with talks for an additional port and new intermodal facility currently taking place. The city is further strengthened by its railway lines and its proximity to two major Interstates, I-40/540 and I-49. Legislators are actively pursuing funds for an extension that would connect neighboring city Alma to Texarkana. Such factors have contributed to continued growth in Van Buren's manufacturing, agricultural, and other sectors. International companies utilize the city's ideal location, including Bekaert, which recently announced that it would invest \$16 million dollars into expanding its Van Buren plant. In March, Van Buren was named one of four pilot cities in Governor Asa Hutchinson and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission's new Competitive Communities Initiative. The program prepares cities to compete for jobs and helps drive economic development. City and Chamber leaders will work closely with organizations, such as the Western Arkansas Planning and Development District (WAPDD), to craft a business retention and expansion plan that will further capitalize on this unique opportunity from the state.

Van Buren's rich heritage has helped shaped it into a flourishing community that both celebrates its past and has lofty visions for its future. Citizens, leaders, the Chamber, and other key groups have spent the past decade bringing old buildings back to life and recruiting new businesses, all while building upon the success of established institutions. Progress can be seen all around, in its industry, its schools, and its residences. It is an ideal locale for families and visitors of all ages. Learn more about all the new exciting things happening in historic Van Buren by visiting VanBuren.org.