

SEEDS OF GROWTH

A Newsletter from the Crossett Economic Development Foundation

From the Director's Desk An Update from Mike Smith

Progress...Webster's dictionary defines it as "a forward movement as to an object of goal." But look at the next definition--"Gradual Betterment." That is perhaps the best description of successful rural economic development I've heard. It isn't fast and it usually isn't grand...but it is better. We certainly look forward to the day we can land a project that creates a few hundred jobs in Crossett, but we take just as much pride in the days we spend helping a company navigate a logistics issue that was costing their company money. Often times, it's the little things that keep the doors open for a small business in our community, like figuring out a way to lower their internet costs or connecting them with a new supplier.

Gradual Betterment. When a company closes, leaving an empty building, we help market that building. Somewhere there is a company looking for that building. Our job is to make sure they know that building is available in Crossett. We build and foster relationships with state agencies and utility companies who can provide incentives and assistance to a company looking to locate or expand.

Gradual Betterment. The school district realized access to solar power would cut their electric costs significantly. We waived requirements for locating in the Industrial Park to allow the solar farm company to purchase a small piece of property.

Gradual Betterment. The Foundation applied for and received grants to have environmental studies done on both the Crossett Municipal Building and E. C. Crossett Recreation Center. These studies are required before construction but were done at no cost to the city. The information gained from the studies will assist the City in making informed decisions about the properties. We also worked with the City to secure grant funds to help renovate the E. C. Crossett Recreation Center.

Gradual Betterment. Crossett needed a facility to host company trainings, class reunions, weddings and other large-scale events. The Foundation renovated a portion of the former GP office building for this purpose. Our calendar stays full, and we are looking at future improvements for the building.

Gradual Betterment. Our Revamp Crossett Grant Program offers money to local businesses for cleaning and beautifying the exterior of their property. This grant program can help you paint, landscape, install new lighting and much more.

Gradual Betterment...Progress. Crossett is progressing. Small steps, yes, but progress. Be assured we are working every day to make Crossett the best it can be. After all, it's our home too!

Working for our future,



Existing Industry Investing & Creating Jobs

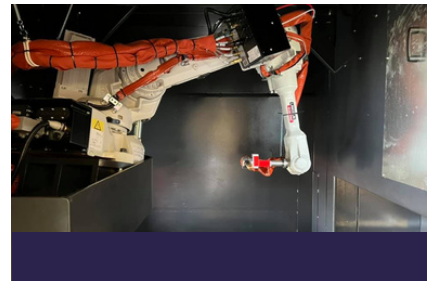
AOP Metal Fabricators recently announced a \$1 million investment in their facility in Crossett. The new 6-axis robotic plasma structural steel processor resulted in an immediate creation of 10 new jobs in the shop. As the company's workload increases, AOP owners anticipate a significant increase in numbers for their field crews in coming month. Matt Dickerson, AOP owner, explained that the new machine will allow jobs to be completed faster and more efficiently. The company will also be able to secure projects that would have been unattainable before investing in this new machinery.

"The speed and detail we get with the new machine is better than we imagined. We can now process steel with faster lead time and deliver a higher quality product," Dickerson explained.

"This is one of only a handful of this type of machine currently operating in the United States," said Mike Smith, Crossett Economic Development Foundation executive director. "We are fortunate to have a company with vision, like AOP, who are willing to invest to bring this opportunity to Crossett." The Crossett Economic Development Foundation awarded AOP a \$10,000 Business Development Grant to assist with the equipment purchase.

AOP Metal Fabricators opened in Crossett as Arkansas Oregon Pneumatics in 1970. The company has seen many changes over the years and now offers full scale industrial and field services to the pulp & paper industries across the South. Through ownership changes and a name change, the company has remained committed to high quality service and keeping jobs in Crossett.

"AOP is dedicated to growing our business in Crossett and are grateful for all the assistance we have received from the Crossett Economic Development Foundation," said Dickerson.



Historic Recreation Center Getting Spruce Up

The City of Crossett was recently awarded a Community Development Block Grant from Arkansas Economic Development Commission in the amount of \$300,000 for renovations to the historic E. C. Crossett Recreation Center.

"This building is so special to the history of our community. We are happy to be able to preserve this property to keep it useful for future generations," explained Mayor Crystal Marshall.

The proposed renovation of the approximately 3,840 square foot Recreation Center will transform the building into a community showpiece that will be a gathering place for citizens of all ages, especially the youth in the community. Renovation plans have been developed through the collaborated efforts of the City of Crossett and the E. C. Crossett Recreation Center Board of Directors to address structural, safety and accessibility issues facing the building, while maintaining its historic integrity. A new roof with the addition of pitched insulation will be installed to alleviate problems caused by a traditional flat roof. The new roof is imperative to the future of the building to stop the continual water leaks and endless drain on City funds to patch the current roof. The city is also proposing to replace all 38 windows to further weather tight the building. The historic windows are steel encasement and are badly deteriorated from rust. Replacing these with new windows of similar appearance will stop leaks and be more energy efficient without changing the historic appearance of the building. The building currently has water damage throughout due to leaks over time. The City proposes to repair and clean the damaged areas and repaint both the interior and exterior of the building. Flooring will be replaced and/or repaired throughout the building. The restrooms will be renovated to ensure ADA accessibility. The construction of a new fire-rated closet for the HVAC units will add an additional layer of protection against a common cause of fire in this historic building and help protect our investment for the future.

The E. C. Crossett Recreation Center was built as a gift to Crossett's African American community, using a donation in 1959 from the Crossett family. The original plans for the building stated that downstairs would focus on youth activities and the upstairs would be designated for adult civic affairs. The E. C. Crossett Recreation Center opened in July 1961. This building built during segregation has served the community in many capacities through the years and is a badge of pride for the African American residents of Crossett today. The main room downstairs has served as location for family reunions, political forums, afterschool programs, and other community gatherings for nearly 60 years. The site currently serves as headquarters for the town's annual



Juneteenth Celebration. The top floor has been used as the Masonic Lodge for many years. The main room downstairs serves as a Black History Memorial featuring mural portraits painted by local artists of African Americans of national and local significance.

The function of the facility has changed to be more inclusive of all citizens over time. However, due to significant structural problems, regular activities at the Center have suffered over the past few years.

“The Youth Center Board is excited about the renovations and ready to begin hosting after-school and summer programs again soon,” said Sheila Phillips, City Council member and Youth Center Board member. The Youth Center Board is committed to helping the youth of Crossett succeed by providing the services and the mentors they need.

Many memories center around this building through the generations, but the one thing they all have in common is being a place for the children of Crossett, no matter what your race, religion, or even which side of town you live on. In the mid-1990s, the Youth Center was the hub of activity on Friday night following the football games for young people in the community. Football players, cheerleaders, band members and fans alike would gather here to celebrate the wins or tend their wounded pride from the losses. The Youth Center offered the kids a safe location to come harness the energy flowing through them after the game rather than leaving them to find fun, or more likely trouble, elsewhere. The high school principal would be one of the first to arrive after the game. He'd stay long enough to make sure “his kids” arrived safely, then he'd leave them in the hands of the volunteers and wish them well. His presence helped keep the peace sometimes and helped him stay connected to his students outside of the school. On one such Friday night, four high school boys left the game and headed to El Dorado to pick up their dates for a post-game dance at the Youth Center. Sadly, those boys never made it to the dance. They were involved in a fatal car accident just outside of town. Their friends, classmates, and even some family members were at that dance waiting for them to arrive and meet these special girls from the next town over, when instead they received the devastating news of the accident. In the blink of an eye, the Youth Center changed from a place of celebration that night to a place of grief, tears and support. That's what community does. It adapts to the needs of its people. That night those kids needed a safe place not to party, but to grieve...and as it had on countless occasions, the Youth Center served.



New Company Bringing Jobs to Crossett

The Crossett Economic Development Foundation is proud to welcome Primoris Renewable Energy to Crossett. They will be refurbishing and rehabilitating the property that previously housed Ram-Fab in the North Crossett Industrial Park. This project will create 80 new jobs at more than twice the county's average hourly wage and offer a full benefit package. The company will create between \$3 and 4 million in annual payroll.

"Projects like these are possible because of the ¼ cent sales tax the citizens of Crossett voted to dedicate to economic development," said Mike Smith, executive director of the Crossett Economic Development Foundation.

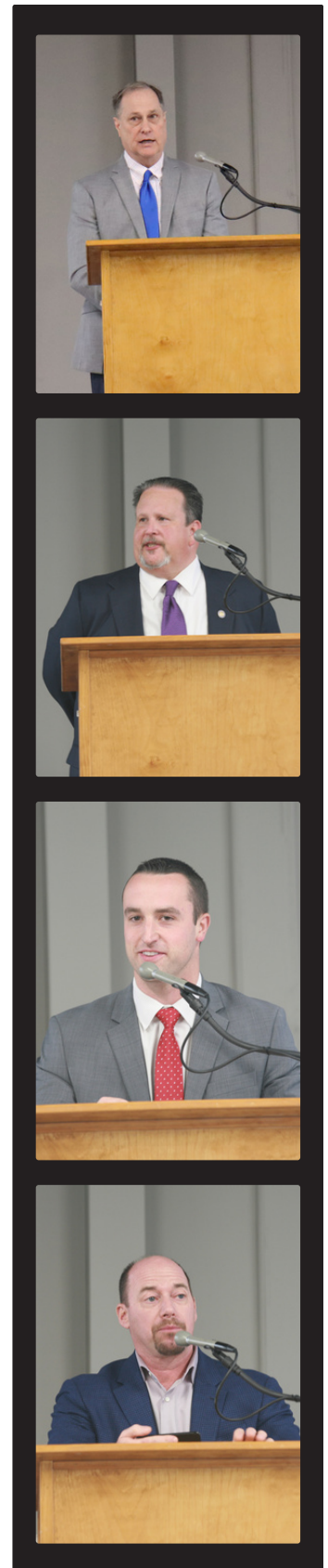
To assist with their investment in Crossett, Crossett Economic Development Foundation presented Primoris Renewable Energy with a grant for \$50,000.

"This industry is a perfect fit for small town America," explained Stephen Jones, President of Primoris Renewable Energy. "We are excited about the opportunities that renewable energy gives our company to recharge small towns."

Primoris Renewable Energy, a division of Primoris Services Corporation, is based in Denver, Colorado. Renovation work to the facility will start immediately. The company began hiring in March.

"We are excited to be a part of the Crossett community and look forward to building our business here," said Anthony Vorderbruggen, Senior Vice-President of Operations for Primoris Renewable Energy.

Welcome to Crossett!



UAM-CTC Students Win Medal at Skills USA Welding Competition

Twelve (12) University of Arkansas at Monticello College of Technology-Crossett (UAM-CTC) welding students competed at the Arkansas Skills USA Conference from April 11 through April 13 in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Four of these UAM-CTC students competed in the welding sculptures events where three took home medals. The medal winners are concurrent high school welding students from Hamburg High School and Crossett High School.

Linda Rushing, Vice Chancellor for UAM-CTC offered congratulations to the students for their success stating, "We are so incredibly proud of all the welding students that competed at the Arkansas Skills USA Conference. It was a great life experience for them. The students worked so hard and represented us well. In our eyes they are all winners. Bringing home Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals was just a bonus."

Donnie DuBose, Welding Instructor at UAM-CTC said, "I am thankful for each student in our welding program, and we will continue to strive for excellence here at UAM-CTC".

Skills USA students compete in events such as welding, pipe welding, and welding sculptures. Students who earn Gold medals are eligible to compete at the National Skills USA Conference in Atlanta, GA, from June 22 through June 24.



CONGRATULATIONS

Gatlin Hale (Hamburg), Cy Dodson (Crossett), Aaron Nelms (Hamburg), and Kenneth Vail (Hamburg) competed in Pipe Welding. Cameron Franks (Hamburg), Rylan Roberts (Crossett), Daniel Valencia (Hamburg), and Benjamin Lewis (UAM-CTC) competed in the Welding event.





Braiden Bradford (Hamburg High School) won a gold (1st) medal for Gone But Not Forgotten.



JC Chenos (Crossett High School) participated with his sculpture Ashley County 18-Wheeler.

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Ryan Wall (Crossett High School) won a silver (2nd) medal for The Dream Hunt.

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Michael Haunte (Hamburg High School) won a bronze (3rd) medal for Together as One.



Community Partner Spotlight

Crossett Area Chamber of Commerce

The Crossett Area Chamber of Commerce began in the 1947 to carry out the vision of local business owners to advance the general welfare and prosperity of the Crossett area so that its citizens and all areas of its business community shall prosper. For 75 years, the Chamber has been at the table offering expertise and offering a helping hand to make Crossett the place where people want to live and businesses want to work.

The Crossett Area Chamber of Commerce is a 501-C6 not-for-profit volunteer organization working for the interests of the community of the Crossett area. The membership is made up of businesses, professionals, organizations and individuals who are interested in the economic and community development of the Crossett area. There are no restrictions on who can be a Chamber member. The Chamber is funded through annual membership dues. Projects of the Chamber are funded by sponsorships and donations made by businesses, professionals, organizations and individuals of the community.

Whether it's promoting tourism through local events, like the Buddy Bass Tournament or Christmas in Crossett, or fostering volunteerism by sponsoring local clean-up days, the Chamber director, board and membership are keeping their eye on the goal of making Crossett the best it can be.

The Crossett Economic Development Foundation is proud to call the Chamber a partner in growing Crossett. The Chamber Executive Director serves as an ex-officio member of the Foundation board, and the Foundation Executive Director serves in a similar position on the Chamber Board. Our organizations have the same end goal, but the manner in which we accomplish this goal is different. The strong sense of community built by the Crossett Chamber are vital in assisting the Foundation in business retention and recruitment. The Chamber works tirelessly to make sure Crossett's charm shines. Thank you for all you do!



**CONGRATULATIONS
Mayor Crystal Marshall and
Grant Writer Cherub Alford on
completing the Arkansas
Municipal League's
Basic Grant Writing and
Management Certificate**

This 16-hour training course covered a wide range of grant writing and management topics, including budgets, narrative writing and compliance after award.



**Arkansas Primary Election
Tuesday, May 24**

Early Voting until May 23
Crossett Event Center and Hamburg Court House
Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm
Saturday 10 am-4 pm