

# SEEDS OF GROWTH

A Newsletter from the Crossett  
Economic Development Foundation

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## From the Director's Desk

An Update from Mike Smith

Crossett has been blessed with many positive developments over the last few months. As it happens, positivity often builds on itself and challenges other sectors to reach for even higher standards of performance.

RES Renewables intends build a large solar farm in Crossett, which will provide significant new revenue to the various entities that depend on property tax proceeds. The development would also generate significant opportunities for local contractors to bid on this job. And, of course, with this work comes payroll dollars turning over in our community.

Many projects we are working on are only possible because of the strong infrastructure and partnerships we have in place. For example, strong local workforce employed by the AL&M allow the Foundation to market the railroad to companies who will only consider sites along a well-maintained rail line. Representatives from the AL&M often assist us with hosting prospects, by providing information about the railroad, transportation rates, service agreements and rail-spur engineering assistance.

Our community set a goal to become an ACT Certified Work Ready Community. We are excited to announce we have reached that goal. This program provides information to companies regarding the skills the workers of this community can provide to a new employer. You can find more information about his important program at [www.workreadycommunities.org](http://www.workreadycommunities.org).

Crossett has many positive programs that are attractive to companies. The above are only a few, and our Foundation will continue to utilize all of our available resources to attract new jobs and new opportunities to Crossett.

Working for our future,



# Solar Farm Project Moving Forward

RES Renewables will soon be locating a new 800-acre solar farm in Crossett, east of Highway 82 just south of Tech-Pro. The power generated from this location will interconnect and serve the Ashley-Chicot Electric Co-op, as part of the Arkansas Rural Electric Cooperative system. The solar farm will use the latest technology capable of generating electricity from the sun's beams hitting the top of the panels as well as generating energy from the beams that bounce off of the ground and strike the bottoms of the panels. Green energy projects, such as solar farms, are especially important to our local economy because their presence in our community help make Crossett a more attractive location to other companies in the future.

Economic development projects are most often a slow process. Work may begin in the very early stages of a project and continue through financing, land acquisition, and project development and eventually construction. Setbacks can occur at any point that can delay or even destroy a project. We, at the Crossett Economic Development Foundation, realize that it can be frustrating for members of the public to hear that "we are still working" with a certain project when you haven't seen dirt turned yet, but in the economic development world "still working" means that particular project hasn't taken Crossett off their list. This solar farm project is a great example of a team effort spanning more than 18 months of work. The Foundation has worked with RES Renewables, as well as Weyerhaeuser, Arkansas Rural Electric Coop, the City of Crossett, private landowners, local contractors and others to bring this project together. It would not have happened without all of these entities working together to make Crossett stronger.

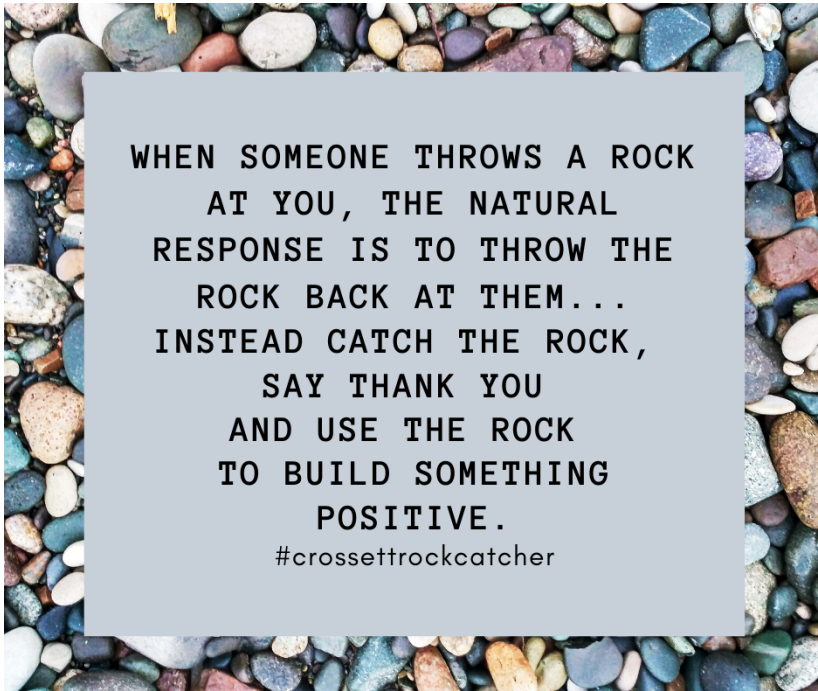
When construction is at full swing, the project will require up to 600 workers. Construction of the solar farm is expected to take nine months to complete. Construction of the project will be put out for bid by the company once planning is complete. Local contractors and subcontractors will be given consideration.

The City of Crossett recently approved a bond issue worth up to \$140 million to help secure the completion of the solar farm project. Once completed, the solar farm will add approximately \$120 million worth of capital improvements to property selected for the project. The solar farm is unique in that it will generate more than \$7 million in new taxes, while adding little burden to local infrastructure, thus creating a huge will for our local government agencies. The project is expected to generate the following in funds in new property taxes annually:

|                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| County General   | \$21,639  |
| City of Crossett | \$29,429  |
| County Road      | \$6,059   |
| County Library   | \$3,895   |
| School           | \$172,979 |

More details about the project will be forthcoming as they are available.





At the recent, Crossett Area Chamber of Commerce banquet the crowd was inspired by the presentation of Mayor Sheldon Day of Thomasville, Alabama and his take on small town development. He includes positive attitudes and unexpected partnerships as essential pieces to his community's success.

*Are you planning an  
event and need a place  
to have it?*

Have you considered the  
Crossett Community Center?

**GIVE US A CALL 870-364-8745**



# Community Partner Spotlight

## Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad

Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad operates a 53-mile shortline railroad freight service from Crossett to Monroe, Louisiana, under the ownership of Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. AL&M connects with the Kansas City Southern line at Monroe and the Fordyce & Princeton at Crossett, which later connects to the Union Pacific line in Fordyce, Arkansas. These connections help keep Crossett competitive when attempting to attract new industry because of the reliability and cost effectiveness of shipping into and out of Crossett via rail. This railroad line was originally opened in 1908 under the name Arkansas, Louisiana and Gulf Railway and has undergone several corporate reorganizations since. The line was purchased by current owner, Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. in 2004. Traffic consists of lumber, paper, forest products and chemicals.

The Crossett Economic Development Foundation works closely with the Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad to market the Crossett Industrial Park. We strive to keep the Railroad's Industrial Development team up-to-date on any changes that are made at the Crossett Industrial Park.

AL&M's Industrial Development Team often assists the Foundation when hosting prospects in Crossett. They are always quick to provide assistance and information to prospects regarding moving raw materials into and finished products out of Crossett to their final destination.



The Foundation has worked closely with AL&M's Spur Development and Engineering Team when designing past rail spurs to ensure that all railroad specifications are met while keeping development costs as economical as possible. The railroad requires regular track inspections of all rail spurs in the Industrial Park to guarantee that safety is maintained.

The Foundation recognizes that access to rail is a vital part of many company's consideration when choosing a location for a new facility. If a company's financial model requires rail transportation to make the numbers work, there is no other substitute. Crossett is fortunate to have rail as the northern boundary to our growing Industrial Park. The Foundation recognizes the importance of our strong partnership with AL&M Railroad to the success of recruiting new industries to Crossett.



# Money keeps things flowing...

From the Grants Desk



For several years, the Crossett Sewer Committee has been working to develop a plan to improve the capacity and function of the city's sewer system in the area beginning at the intersection of highways 82 and 133, near McDonald's, heading westward to Ashley County Medical Center and south to the Crossett Industrial Park. About 20 years ago, this area of town began to rapidly develop commercially, with the relocation of the hospital and Wal-Mart and the development of the Crossett Industrial Park. Other businesses soon followed. Simply put, the growth happened faster than the infrastructure could be upgraded. The Crossett Sewer Committee and staff have done a wonderful job of making the system work, but we have reached the point that a major restructure is necessary.

The proposed improvements will eliminate three small pump stations and incorporate one larger, central pump station. Two of these small pump stations currently empty into the pump station at the Crossett Industrial Park. The amount of flow through the Industrial Park pump station will be reduced

by more than half, significantly increasing the excess capacity for the Industrial Park. The new design will also change the system to a gravity flow system which will benefit 22 commercial properties in the area.

A project of this size takes a great deal of time to plan and finance. Once the feasibility study and preliminary engineering on the project was complete, it became time to tackle the financing. Two years ago, the Foundation began working with the sewer committee on steps to secure possible grants and low-interest loans to fund the project.

The Foundation submitted an application, on behalf of the City, last spring to the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) for a grant and/or loan. Through this process, ANRC reviews the application and determines two answers: (1) whether to fund the project or not and (2) whether to offer the applicant a low-interest loan, a grant or a combination of the two. In our case, ANRC offered a loan in the amount of \$7 million dollars. Recently, the City Council voted to call for a special election to request of ½ cent sales tax increase to be used to repay the loan for the sewer improvements.

The Foundation is continuing to seek grant funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. While no grant is guaranteed, the Foundation is hopeful based on the strength of the plan that has been developed and the economic distress determination that has been placed on the region due to recent job losses. If this grant is awarded to the City, the Foundation estimates that it could save the city approximately \$2.4 million in premium and interest payment on the construction project.

Infrastructure projects, such as this, help ensure that Crossett stays competitive in the economic development world. Sewer and water quality, capacity and reliability are on the top of the list of items to consider for a company looking for a new location. Assisting with funding of needed infrastructure projects is one way that Crossett Economic Development Foundation keeps Crossett poised for growth.



# Thanks to the Weyerhaeuser Foundation for investing in our community!



Crossett School District was awarded \$5,350 to purchase new equipment and practice material for the Quiz Bowl teams at Crossett High School and Crossett Middle School.

The Crossett Economic Development Foundation received \$4,670 to help purchase tables and chairs for the new community center.



# Ashley County achieves national workforce development certification

Ashley County has met all criteria to become a certified ACT Work Ready Community, demonstrating its commitment to developing a strong workforce pipeline, desirable to employers, economic developers and current and future citizens of the county.

The ACT Work Ready Communities initiative empowers states, regions and counties with data, processes and tools that drive economic growth by identifying skills gaps and quantifying the skill level of their workforce. Participants leverage the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate to measure and close skills gaps and build common frameworks that link, align and match their workforce development efforts.

To begin the certification process, Ashley County leaders attended the ACT Work Ready Communities Boot Camp, an executive leadership and training program designed and led by ACT to initiate, deploy, and drive carefully tailored efforts to improve the county's work readiness. Leaders met with local employers, policymakers, educators and economic developers to establish goals and build a sustainable Work Ready Community model to fit community needs.

"Ashley County's certification is a result of a great local team of leaders from economic development, business, education and government who have worked together to plan and promote this workforce initiative in our community," explained Mike Smith, Crossett Economic Development Foundation Executive Director and Ashley County Work Ready Community Team Leader. "This certification illustrates Ashley County's commitment to workforce development to companies around the world."

"Congratulations to Ashley County for becoming an ACT Work Ready Community and joining a growing list of counties dedicated to building a robust workforce," said ACT Regional Manager of Workforce Initiatives, Tony Garife. "The efforts of the community leadership to achieve Work Ready Community certification will provide the community with a tremendous economic development advantage and help it stand out for its workforce development efforts."

For more information on this initiative, go to [www.workreadycommunities.org](http://www.workreadycommunities.org) and view all of ACT's workforce solutions at [www.act.org/workforce](http://www.act.org/workforce).

