



***Igniting our Region's Capacity for Growth  
2015 Celebratory Summit***

***May 28, 2015***

***ASU Carl R. Reng Student Union Center  
Jonesboro, AR***

**Schedule of Events**

Time	Event
7:00 a.m.	Registration Opens
8:30 a.m.	Invocation, Welcoming Message and Opening Remarks
9:00 a.m.	Future of Public Funding Panel
10:15 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m.	Future of Philanthropic Funding Panel
11:15 a.m.	Data Presentation – the Baseline of East Arkansas
11:45 a.m.	Morning Wrap-up
12 noon	Lunch Buffet
12:45 p.m.	Keynote Address
1:30 p.m.	Release for Break-out Sessions
1:45 p.m.	Early Break-out Sessions
2:45 p.m.	Break
3:00 p.m.	Late Break-out Sessions
4:00 p.m.	Reconvene for Closing Remarks
4:10 p.m.	Closing Remarks
4:30 p.m.	Adjourn

# Summit Session Descriptions

## Invocation and Welcoming Message

**Invocation led by Pastor Sherman Smith, Total Deliverance Cathedral Church, Earle, Arkansas.**

**Welcoming Message from Dr. Lynita Cooksey, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research.**

## Opening Remarks

Following the opening welcome by Dr. Cooksey, Melissa Rivers will open the summit with highlights of the regional plan and direction for the East Arkansas Planning and Development District (EAPDD).

**About Melissa Rivers, EAPDD Executive Director:** Melissa came to the East Arkansas Planning and Development District as the Executive Director in 2011. Melissa provides a proven track record of leading organizations toward stability and growth, identifying and leveraging traditional and non-traditional resources, and creatively approaching network and partnership expansions. Her greatest strengths include:

- Strong track record of bottom-line responsibility for organizational management, program development, partnership cultivation and resource development;
- Extensive knowledge of economic and community development;
- Wide-ranging experience in strategic planning and implementation; and
- Expertise in developing partnerships and implementing innovative strategies for urban and rural communities and regions.



## Future of Public Funding Panel

EAPDD has gathered several leaders from Federal and State agencies to share their perspectives about the future of public funding. Representatives include:

**Jessica Falk, Economic Development Administration, Austin, TX:**

**Dr. John Thomas, Director, Community Assistance and Research Division, Office of Sustainable Communities, Environmental Protection Agency:**

**Wanda C. Merritt, Arkansas Field Office Director, US Housing and Urban Development:**

Wanda C. Merritt was named the Field Office Director for the Little Rock HUD Office in January 2014. Previously, she served in the same capacity at the HUD Office in Lubbock, Texas. As Field Office Director, she serves as the principal management official and liaison to elected

representatives, state and local officials, Congressional representatives and stakeholders. She is responsible for overseeing the delivery of HUD programs and services throughout the entire state of Arkansas.



Wanda has received numerous honors and recognition for her more than 27 years of experience in community & economic development and housing. In June 1998, she accepted the Angel Network Award from Oprah Winfrey for a single family housing initiative she implemented in Abilene, Texas with Habitat for Humanity and Interested Citizens of Abilene North (ICAN). She was recognized by Mayor Glen Robertson and the Lubbock, Texas City Council in July 2012 for her leadership at HUD and her achievements in the field of housing and economic development. In June 2013, Wanda received HUD's Regional Administrator's Medallion Award in recognition of her excellence, hard work and commitment to the mission of the Department.

Wanda successfully completed HUD's prestigious Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) and attended Harvard University -- John F. Kennedy School of Government, Executive Programs in Public Management. She earned an MBA and a Bachelors of Business of Administration Degree in Business Management from Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas.



**Lawrence McCullough, Director, State of Arkansas, USDA Rural Development:** Lawrence was appointed State Director of Arkansas USDA Rural Development August 24, 2009. Prior to this appointment he retired January 3rd, 2009 with 39 years at USDA.

Lawrence was Director, Single Family Housing for 14 years. Prior to becoming Director, Single Family Housing, he served as Assistant to FmHA State Director, District Director in North Little Rock and Jonesboro, Farmer Program Specialist, Assistant District Director in Monticello, and County Supervisor in Ouachita and Lee Counties.

Lawrence is a native of Monroe County, where he was raised on a farm. He and his wife, Joyce has four (4) children: Angela, Kimberly, Roslyn, and Jared.

Lawrence has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture Education from Arkansas AM&N College, now University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). He received an army commission and served in the Army Reserve for twenty-one years retiring with the rank of Major.

Lawrence proudly serves on the Arkansas Weatherization Policy Advisory Council, The Governor's Task Force on Supported Housing, and The Arkansas Housing Advisory Committee. He started his USDA career as an Assistant County Supervisor with FmHA in Little River County in 1971 and has worked in many areas of Arkansas since that beginning.

**Antonio D. Johnson, GISP, Transportation Planner, Arkansas Highway and Transportation Planning and Policy Division:**

Antonio serves as Transportation Planner with the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD). Antonio’s career expertise includes rural and urban transportation planning and Title VI and Environmental Justice analysis. Before joining AHTD in August 2014, Antonio served as the Director of Regional Planning and Research at Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency. In the capacity of Director, he managed the Middle Tennessee Rural Planning Organization, Title VI and Environmental Justice Planning, Emergency Management Planning, and the agency’s Geographic Information Systems and Analysis Program.



Antonio holds a Master of Geographic Information Systems from University of Central Arkansas and a Bachelor of Science in Social Science from Tennessee State University. He has served on numerous transportation planning committees. Additionally, he has authored several articles, and collaborated in research and planning projects at the University of Maryland, College Park, and other various colleges and universities.

**Future of Philanthropic Funding Panel**

As public funding becomes scarcer, it will be more and more important to find private philanthropic partners with which to leverage our assets. Distinguished guests from foundations will be on hand to talk about their funding priorities and the types of projects and programs they seek for investment. Panelists include:

**David Johnson, Arkansas Community Foundation (or representative)**



**Cory Anderson, Executive Vice President, Winthrop-Rockefeller Foundation:**

Cory Anderson is WRF’s executive vice president responsible for managing the Foundation’s Program Team and leading the Foundation’s grant making efforts. Cory came to the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation in 2008 after seven years with the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland, where he worked to support state-level child advocacy organizations.

A variety of job experiences prepared Cory for his work with the Foundation. As a reporter with the Arkansas Gazette, he researched and reported on issues related to school, children, and higher education. His roles as a juvenile probation officer, as a program coordinator for a direct service program that provided an array of services to families and children, and as a state program specialist with the Corporation for National Service with responsibility for 25 AmeriCorps VISTA projects add valuable knowledge and skills. Cory also served as a gang intervention specialist and later as a jobs program specialist with New Futures for Youth.

In addition to working for the Annie E. Casey Foundation during his time away from Arkansas, Cory was manager of partner development at the Forum for Youth Investment in Washington, D.C., engaging national organizations in partnerships designed to strengthen youth work.

Cory formerly served on the boards of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees and the Health Policy Board of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement.

Cory, is married to Dr. Phillis Nichols-Anderson, senior vice president of a national charter school management organization. He is pursuing a master's degree in theology from Anderson University. The Andersons have three sons – a high school Junior at home, a college Sophomore at Morehouse, and a movie-maker in Los Angeles. They also have a daughter who is an attorney, and two grandchildren.



**Dr. Karama Neal, Chief Operating Officer, Southern Bancorp Community Partners:** Karama Neal, PhD, MA, uses her experience in nonprofit management, genetics and bioethics research, and social justice blogging to promote equal access to health, education, and opportunity for all people through teaching, research, practice, advocacy, and service. Her experience in academic, corporate, and nonprofit arenas has given her broad experience in strategic planning, public speaking, technical and persuasive writing, and evaluation. She conceptualizes, develops, directs, and promotes a variety of solution-oriented programs, projects, and opportunities that support positive social change that is sustainable, scalable, and/or replicable. She strives to recognize the difference between the provision of charity and the establishment of justice, with her energy focused primarily on the latter.

Karama was drawn to the basic biosciences because of the potential to contribute to human wellness. After many years in that field, she transitioned to work that has a more immediate effect on human well-being. Karama speaks frequently on family economic security, internet equity, career development, and her faith. She has taught both online and in the classroom at Emory University, Loyola University Chicago, Shorter College, and the Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences.

In addition to experience teaching biology, bioethics, and other subjects, Karama has worked in bioinformatics and program management. She currently serves as Chief Operating Officer at Southern Bancorp Community Partners where she manages direct service and public policy programs promoting family economic mobility in rural Arkansas and Mississippi. She maintains an active interest in heir property retention policy, internet equity, and nontraditional access to education.

Karama is the author of the award winning blog, So What Can I Do, and serves on the Arkansas Broadband Council. After graduating from the historic Little Rock Central High School, Karama completed her undergraduate degree in biology at Swarthmore College and later earned her doctorate in genetics from Emory University and her masters in bioethics from Loyola University Chicago. She recently completed executive education in impact investing at the University of Oxford. Karama lives in Little Rock with her family.

### **Data Presentation – The Baseline of Eastern Arkansas**

Brian Kelsey will introduce us to the newly created data platform for East Arkansas. He'll also provide us with a snapshot of how the region measures up against the rest of the state and the nation, demonstrating the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for growth by the numbers.



**About Brian Kelsey, Principal and Founder of Civic Analytics:** Brian Kelsey has helped clients of all sizes — from rural communities to the White House — design and implement successful economic development strategies. Brian brings to every research challenge a rare combination of deep analytical thinking and the ability to explain complex information in simple terms. Prior to founding Civic Analytics, Brian was a senior advisor at the U.S. Economic Development Administration, where he engineered the Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge, a \$37 million program across 16 federal agencies to drive regional innovation and job growth. Brian also has extensive experience as an economic development practitioner, university professor and author.

### **Morning Wrap-up**



Danielle Arigoni will wrap up the morning panel discussions and get everyone prepared for an afternoon of thought-provoking discourse. She'll remind us of the importance of having a strategic direction based on sound measurement and research.

**About Danielle Arigoni, Acting Director, HUD Office of Economic Resilience:** Danielle Arigoni serves as Acting Director of HUD's Office of Economic Resilience. In her current role, she provides leadership support to HUD's Resilience Council and the National Disaster Resilience Competition, serves as one of the principal liaisons to the HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities, and helps provide expert guidance to intra-agency efforts in HUD to strengthen place-based approaches. Between 2000 and 2014, Danielle worked at EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities, serving in several capacities in that office, including Acting Director, Acting Deputy Director, and the Director for the Codes, Standards, and Sustainable Design Division. Her efforts there focused on strengthening federal investments in more sustainable outcomes through grant awards, strategic planning, and evaluation, as well as on promoting the affordability and environmental

benefits of more compact, green housing and community development through technical assistance, policy analysis, and research.

Danielle has been working in the fields of planning, municipal management, affordable housing, and smart growth both domestically and internationally for more than 20 years, and has been a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. She holds a Master's degree in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University, and a Bachelor's degree in Planning and Public Policy from the University of Oregon.

### **Keynote Address**

#### **Introduction by Mayor Harold Perrin, City of Jonesboro:**



#### **About Dr. Jan Young, Executive Director of the Assisi Foundation of**

**Memphis:** Dr. Young has had a distinguished career in education, health care, the military and philanthropy. As Executive Director of The Assisi Foundation of Memphis, Dr. Young has overall accountability for the implementation of the Foundation's philanthropic activities, management, community relations and strategic direction.

Dr. Young received her Doctorate of Nursing Science, is a summa cum laude graduate and recipient of the Faculty Award from the University of Tennessee Health Sciences College of Nursing. She is a recipient of Outstanding Alumna awards from both the University of Memphis and University of Tennessee. Prior to joining the Assisi Foundation in 1995, Dr. Young served as Senior Vice President of Operations with leadership accountability for clinical and support services for St. Joseph Hospital. In addition, she has worked as a management consultant, served as adjunct faculty for the University of Tennessee and University of Memphis in nursing administration, and maintained a private clinical practice.

Dr. Young's military service began with the U.S. Army Nursing Corps Reserves and later transferred to the Air National Guard. In 1990, she received the national honor of Outstanding Air National Guard Nurse and led the team that received the Air National Guard's first Outstanding Health Promotion Program Award. Throughout her career, she received numerous military awards including the Legion of Merit. She served as a military primary care nurse practitioner, Health Promotions Manager, Chief Nurse, Chief of Staff for Joint Forces Headquarters, Tennessee Air National Guard, and the Air National Guard Assistant to the Surgeon General, United States Air Force, Medical Force Development and Nursing Services. In 2005, Dr. Young was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General; in 2009, to the rank of Major General. She served as the Air National Guard Assistant to Air Education and Training Command in her final military assignment through 2012. In that role, she focused on national policy issues, analysis and evaluation.

After her retirement from the military, she co-authored the book Bridges to Health and Healthcare, published in late spring of 2014. Dr. Young dabbles in a variety of creative arts and crafts and is a self-proclaimed “master of none.” She has multiple interests, holds a variety of certifications, and has been an invited speaker for local, regional and national conferences.

### **Break-out Sessions**

EAPDD is providing a series of break-out sessions designed to give participants concrete and usable information you can immediately try out in your community. These sessions are designed to complement the priorities identified by our communities through the regional planning process. See the following pages for a full description of the options.

### **Closing Remarks**

Melissa Rivers will again take the stage to provide some closing thoughts and highlights from throughout the day.

# Break-out Session Options

You have chosen one early and one late session through the registration process. Below you'll see descriptions of the sessions and their leaders.

## Building Capacity for Progress

### Early Session:

- **How to Engage the Local Community – Bridget Ciaramitaro, Ciaramitaro and Associates.** Bridget will lead a discussion about unique ways to get your community members involved in planning and implementation.

### Late Session:

- **Four Stages of Civic Condition: How to transform your community from Apathy to Alliance – Brian Cole & Jennifer Watkins, Building Communities, Inc.** Brian and Jennifer will lead you through a distinctive exercise to help diagnose your community's capacity for accomplishment and how to motivate your community to action.

## Using Data for Decisions

### Early Session:

- **How to utilize data to tell your downtown's story and correct your course – Sean Moran, Civic Analytics.** Sean will demonstrate how to utilize EAPDD's new data platform and field guides to analyze and support downtown redevelopment.

### Late Session:

- **How to utilize data to make smarter decisions for your community – Mark Goodman, UALR Institute for Economic Advancement.** Mark will explain how to utilize applied data and analysis to make strategic decisions supporting business and community development, leverage decision making and capture needed data in the future. Participants will walk away with tools you can use immediately.

## Improving our Place

### Early Session:

- **Redeveloping dilapidated properties – James Gilleylen, JQUAD Planning Group.** James will moderate a panel of local leaders discussing ways to initiate and sustain property rehabilitation programs in your community.

### Late Session:

- **Local Produce as a Community Health Driver and Economic Engine: Opportunities in Agriculture, Distribution, and Retail – Emily Esterly, Bush Consulting; Wes Ward, Secretary of Agriculture for State of Arkansas; Jim Barham, Agricultural Economist, USDA Rural Development; John Aufer, Director, Delta Cuisine.** Bush Consulting Group recently completed a community action plan to enhance the regional food system's economic, community, and environmental impact. One focus for the effort is connecting fresh, local produce with low-income populations, as well as populations placing a premium on the value of local food. Led by Bush Consulting and USDA representatives,

a panel of local produce agriculture, distribution, and retail leaders will bring the assessment findings and recommendations to life by sharing opportunities to get involved with, support, or replicate successful strategies throughout the region.

## **Developing our Financial Resources**

### Early Session:

- **How to structure a deal strategically – Christopher Clifton, CED, IOM, President & CEO of Cross County Chamber of Commerce/EDC.** Chris will lead a panel of experts discussing how to market your community and package a project to best leverage resources.

### Late Session:

- **Before you Ask – How to prepare your project for successful funding – Bridget Ciaramitaro, Ciaramitaro and Associates.** Bridget will dispense practical advice on how to prepare your project for grant seeking.

## **Establishing our Economic Foundation**

### Early Session:

- **How to Develop Heritage Tourism Assets in Your Community – Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Executive Director, Arkansas State University Heritage Sites.** Dr. Hawkins will lead a discussion about heritage tourism and how it can impact your community.

### Late Session:

- **Small Business as Economic Development – How entrepreneurs can boost the economy – Cornell Wesley, EAPDD Financial Services Manager.** Cornell will moderate a panel of local small business owners discussing the benefits of entrepreneurship and what communities can do to encourage and support small businesses.

# Break-out Session Leaders

## Building Capacity for Progress

### **EARLY SESSION: How to Engage the Local Community**

**Bridget Ciaramitaro, Founder and President, Ciaramitaro and Associates, LLC:** Bridget founded Ciaramitaro and Associates with a mission to make positive change happen across the Delta region. Her most recent project in Arkansas is the community engagement study she conducted in the twelve counties served by the East Arkansas Planning and Development District as part of the regional strategic planning process. Bridget has won regional, national and international awards for community engagement, leadership development, empowerment and targeted marketing programs while partnering with neighborhoods, utility companies, Tennessee Valley Authority, hospitals and other organizations. These awards include the International Praxis Award, American Public Power Association, Neighborhoods USA, National Communicator Award and the South Eastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging’s “Positive Image of Aging” award. Bridget has been named one of a hundred leaders nationally in the self-determination movement. Bridget is also a consultant to the Assisi Foundation of Memphis implementing the “Before You Ask” Program that she developed. She works with nonprofits in fundraising, board development and strategic and business planning. Bridget has led nonprofits in mergers, turnarounds and revitalizations. Her passion for empowerment, organizational story-telling and visible results inevitably leads to engagement and change.

### **LATE SESSION: Four Stages of Civic Condition: How to transform your community from Apathy to Alliance**



**Brian Cole, Founder and President, Building Communities, Inc.:** Brian Cole is President of Building Communities, Inc., a community and economic development strategic planning firm specializing in regional planning. Brian believes the real heroes in America are the people who care enough about their community to give of their time and talent to make better places. Building Communities has conducted 70 strategic plans since 2011, and Brian has written two books on strategic planning for communities.

Brian holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Oregon State University and a Masters of Management degree from Willamette University. Brian is married to his wife, Suzy, and has two adult daughters, Krysti and Kelsey. In his spare time, Brian runs marathons and recovers by playing piano.

**Jennifer Watkins, Director of Plan Facilitation, Building Communities, Inc.:** Jennifer began working for Building Communities in 2012, leading several strategic planning efforts in Oregon, Wyoming, Vermont and



Arkansas. As the team leader for EAPDD's reNEW East Arkansas project, Jennifer has managed the development of 21 local strategic plans in the region as well as the formation of the regional plan from beginning to end. Prior to joining Building Communities, Jennifer served her own community as the Assistant City Manager and Director of Community Development, completing an extensive portfolio of economic and community development projects and programs over thirteen years. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Eastern Oregon University.

### Using Data for Decisions

#### **EARLY SESSION: How to utilize data to tell your downtown's story and correct your course**



**Sean Moran, Project Director, Civic Analytics:** Sean Moran brings more than 20 years of professional planning, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) experience to every Civic Analytics project. He is an expert at utilizing information technology to facilitate planning, engineering, and environmental initiatives. Through maps and models, he helps clients visualize trends in their communities. In addition to serving Civic Analytics clients, Sean acts as Austin Community College's GIS department chair. Sean has also spent time as a planning director and university professor in his home of Austin, Texas.

#### **LATE SESSION: How to utilize data to make smarter decisions for your community**

**Mark Goodman, Director, Center for Economic Development, UALR Institute for Economic Advancement:** A Certified Economic Developer (CECD), Mark's core knowledge and experience centers around applied economic development information and analytics in support of community business development. Over the past 20 years, Mark has served in both public and private sector economic development organizations, ranging from state and local economic development agencies in Mississippi and Arkansas to two universities, as well as private contract services in market analysis and economic impact assessments. His project experience is extensive in the areas of information packaging for business development projects, business retention and expansion programming, community assessments for economic development, economic impact analysis, retail analysis and labor studies.



## Improving Our Place

### **EARLY SESSION: Redeveloping dilapidated properties**



**James Gilleylen, Managing Partner, JQUAD Planning Group:** James has worked as a professional urban planner for more than 30 years in both the public and private sectors. Since 1994, he has served as Managing Partner for JQUAD Planning Group, a Dallas, Texas based urban planning, housing, and economic and community development consulting firm. JQUAD provides professional support to government, developers, financial institutions, and investment groups in the area of housing and economic development. Prior government experience includes: Director of the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Services and Assistant Director of Planning and Development, City of Dallas, Texas; and Deputy Director of the Office of Planning for the City of Washington, D.C. James earned a Bachelor of Science in Public Administration and Political Science and Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning, both from the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss).

**Mayor Jimmy Williams, City of Marianna**

**Joe Riddle, HOME Program Manager, ADFA**

**Debora Glasgow, Executive Director, South Western Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA), Burns Flat, Oklahoma:** Debora joined SWODA in 1998. Debora was appointed executive director by the SWODA Board of Trustees, April 1, 2011, and is the chief executive, administrative officer and liaison to other state and federal agencies. SWODA provides development services to an eight-county area with a population of more than 110,000 and covers more than 7,000 square miles. Most recently, the new housing development and community improvement program is constructing new modern homes throughout the region.



Debora's leadership stretches from southwest Oklahoma to across the nation. She is active in the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC). Debora serves as vice chairman of the South West Impact Coalition (SOIC) and is Chairman of the South West Region Executive Directors Association (SWREDA) which covers Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas. She also serves on the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Board of Directors. Debora holds a bachelor's degree in public administration from Oklahoma City University and is a graduate of the Community Development Institute at the University of Central Arkansas.



**Karen Peycke, Land Revitalization Coordinator, EPA Region 6:** Karen started work at the U.S. EPA in December 1979. She worked full time at EPA while earning a Bachelor of Science (Geoscience) University of Texas at Dallas by 1997. Under an Interpersonal Services Act, Karen worked as the EPA Liaison to the City of Dallas to assist with brownfields redevelopment under EPA’s Brownfields Showcase Initiative from 1998 through 2001. As EPA Liaison, she assisted redevelopment of a brownfields site into the Center of Hope, a transitional housing/shelter for homeless women and children located on a former brownfields site in Dallas.

Karen returned to EPA’s Brownfields Team in late 2001 to communicate the opportunities available to communities under the EPA’s Brownfields Program, to manage several Brownfields grants as a project officer, and to create a network and information exchange for Region 6 Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Programs. As the Region 6 Land Revitalization Coordinator, she promotes/supports Ready-for-Reuse for RCRA and Superfund sites, green remediation, renewable energy, urban agriculture & community gardens, sustainability, and all levels of government and private partnerships.

**LATE SESSION: Local Produce as a Community Health Driver and Economic Engine: Opportunities in Agriculture, Distribution, and Retail**



**Emily Esterly, Business Strategy Consultant, Bush Consulting Group:** Emily has been a business strategy consultant with Bush Consulting Group since January 2012. Emily leads the economic development practice area to support collaborative regional investment in competitiveness and job growth, including managing and developing the firm’s research and analytical activities. She has been extensively involved in five previous road-mapping efforts, each of which had a sustainable economic development imperative, and has been integral to the refinement of the cluster road-

mapping approach. Prior to joining Bush Consulting Group, Emily was a Senior Consultant at BrownFlynn, a regional sustainability and corporate responsibility consulting firm. She earned her Master’s degree in environmental studies from Cleveland State University as well as Bachelor’s degrees in environmental geology and women’s studies from Vanderbilt University.

**Wes Ward, Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas:** Wes was appointed to serve in this position in March 2015 by Governor Asa Hutchinson. He is from the small town of Lake City in Northeast Arkansas and is a graduate of Riverside High School. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Business with an emphasis in Agricultural Finance from Arkansas State University. Wes earned a law degree and



completed the LL.M. program (Master of Laws) in Agricultural and Food Law at the University of Arkansas. Wes has been serving in the United States Marine Corps for nearly 15 years and has completed deployments to Afghanistan and Jordan. He is currently a Captain and a Civil Affairs Officer in the Marine Corps Reserves. Aside from the Marine Corps, Wes has also worked as a Field Coordinator for Congressman Rick Crawford doing agricultural outreach and as an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of Arkansas School of Law.

**Jim Barham, Agricultural Economist, USDA Rural Development:** Jim obtained an MA in Cultural Anthropology and a PhD in Interdisciplinary Ecology from the University of Florida. Before joining the USDA, Jim worked extensively in the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean with a number of nonprofit organizations and government agencies on agricultural development projects targeting smallholder producers. Jim joined USDA in 2007 where he has worked to improve marketing opportunities for small and mid-size producers through a combination of research, technical assistance, and grant support. Jim has presented research and published a number of articles on regional food hubs, food value chains, local food distribution, and foodservice procurement. He is also currently on the management team of USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" Initiative – a USDA-wide effort to support the development of local and regional food systems.

**Keith Forrester, Owner/Operator, Whitton Farms:**



**John Auker, Executive Director, Delta Cuisine Commercial Kitchen and Business Incubator, Mid-South Community College, West Memphis, Arkansas:** John has a BA in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois, and an MBA with dual concentration in Marketing and Economics from Southern Illinois University, where he was also a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant in Economics.

John has over 25 years of corporate experience in the private sector, working for branded and private label food companies and food distributors. Marketing, Sales, Supply Chain and General Management are functional areas of expertise.

John started his consulting career in 2009 when he joined alt.Consulting, a 501c3 nonprofit consulting and management organization in the Memphis and East Arkansas area that assists small businesses, mainly rural and disadvantaged populations. In 2012, Auker assumed responsibility as the Project Manager for Delta Cuisine, tasked with responsibility for starting a food business incubator in partnership with Mid-South Community College Hospitality Program. John is also a certified facilitator for Operation Jump Start, an entrepreneurial program offered in partnership with Southeast Missouri State University, as well as a certified Wealth Works Value Chain Coach and Facilitator.

John also serves on Board of Directors for Arkansas Delta Seeds of Change, and is a member of the Shelby County Food Advisory Council, the Mid-South Community College Hospitality Advisory Board, the West Memphis Farmers Market Advisory Board, and is an independent business consultant.

**Nick Bush, Founding Principal, Bush Consulting Group:** Nick established the Bush Consulting Group, a business advisory firm based in Northeast Ohio and focused on supporting the manufacturing sector and economic development executives in strategic growth initiatives. Nick has 20 years of experience in conducting complex strategy assignments for multi-national clients in a broad range of industries. He also developed the firm's nationally recognized cluster road-mapping approach, and since 2010, has directed or led the development of ten cluster roadmaps on behalf of regional economic development organizations. Prior to founding Bush Consulting Group, Nick served as Vice President at Newry Corp., a Cleveland-based consulting firm, where he led the firm's competitive strategy practice for more than eight years. He joined Newry from Telesis-Towers Perrin, a consulting firm spun out from The Boston Consulting Group. At Telesis, he served as Managing Consultant in its Chicago strategy practice. He has earned degrees from Carnegie Mellon in business and political science.

**Lacey Madison, Consultant, Bush Consulting Group:** Lacey is instrumental in quantitative analysis for Bush Consulting Group's client work with both for-profit and economic development clients. Her analysis has been central to the firm's work with sustainable food business clusters. Her professional focus has been grounded in higher education focused on instruction, curriculum design, database design/management and federal grant administration. Lacey holds a Bachelor's degree in Finance from Kent State University and a Master's degree in Counseling from Xavier University.

### Developing Our Financial Resources

#### **EARLY SESSION: How to structure a deal strategically**



**Christopher Clifton, CED, IOM, President & CEO, Cross County Chamber and Economic Development Corporation:** Chris began his tenure in Cross County in August 2012, bringing a wealth of economic development knowledge to eastern Arkansas. He has over thirty years of experience in economic development, financing and leasing, real estate development and Chamber of Commerce management in Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee. Chris has successfully structured financing and incentive packages for hundreds of new and expanding businesses in his career. As a leading spokesman for growth in East Arkansas, Chris specializes in organizational

development, process management, leasing, transaction analysis and site selection consulting for manufacturing, logistic and medical/back office development. Chris has a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Public Sector Development and a Master's Degree in Public Administration

from Murray State University, is a certified economic developer and holds a number of additional certificates related to Chamber of Commerce management and team building.

**Ben France, Project Manager, Arkansas Economic Development**

**Commission:** Ben has been a Project Manager with AEDC for three years. In this role, he provides corporate clients with site selection and incentive/financing options for companies locating or expanding in Arkansas. He works on projects across Arkansas including the sectors of manufacturing, distribution, corporate headquarters, R&D and data centers. Raised in Little Rock, Ben received a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Memphis and his MBA from the University of Tampa. Prior to joining AEDC, Ben held various roles in the banking industry.



**Mark T. Young, President & CEO, Jonesboro Regional Chamber of**

**Commerce:** Mark has served as President and CEO of the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce since April 2006. The mission of the Chamber is to enhance the quality of life in our community through service, leadership and economic development.

Prior to being named President of the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce, Mark served as Executive Director of the Delta Center for Economic Development at Arkansas State University from 2000 to April, 2006.

Mark has provided economic development leadership in four other communities. He served as the Director of the Cross County Business Development Center in Wynne and as Director of the East Arkansas Community College Business Development Center in Forrest City. He then left Arkansas to serve as Executive Director of the Miami Area Economic Development Services, Inc. in Miami, Oklahoma, and served as Executive Director of the Richmond Economic Partnership in Rockingham, North Carolina.

Mark received his B.S. in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations from Arkansas State University. He is a Certified Economic Developer, receiving that designation in 1994.

Mark serves on the Arkansas District Export Council and is currently the Chairman of the Northeast Arkansas Economic Development Coalition.

Mark is married to Mitzi. They have two sons: Adam age 19 and Alex age 16.

**LATE SESSION: Before you Ask – How to prepare your project for successful funding**

**Bridget Ciaramitaro, Founder and President, Ciaramitaro and Associates, LLC:** Bridget founded Ciaramitaro and Associates with a mission to make positive change happen across the

Delta region. Her most recent project in Arkansas is the community engagement study she conducted in the twelve counties served by the East Arkansas Planning and Development District as part of the regional strategic planning process. Bridget has won regional, national and international awards for community engagement, leadership development, empowerment and targeted marketing programs while partnering with neighborhoods, utility companies, Tennessee Valley Authority, hospitals and other organizations. These awards include the International Praxis Award, American Public Power Association, Neighborhoods USA, National Communicator Award and the South Eastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging's "Positive Image of Aging" award. Bridget has been named one of a hundred leaders nationally in the self-determination movement. Bridget is also a consultant to the Assisi Foundation of Memphis implementing the "Before You Ask" Program that she developed. She works with nonprofits in fundraising, board development and strategic and business planning. Bridget has led nonprofits in mergers, turnarounds and revitalizations. Her passion for empowerment, organizational story-telling and visible results inevitably leads to engagement and change.

### **Establishing Our Economic Foundation**

#### **EARLY SESSION: How to Develop Heritage Tourism Assets in Your Community**

##### **Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Executive Director, Arkansas State University**

**Heritage Sites:** Dr. Hawkins is executive director of Arkansas State University Heritage Sites. This program includes developing and directing the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center at Piggott, the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum at Tyronza, the Lakeport Plantation near Lake Village, and the Historic Dyess Colony: Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash. She also is Executive Director of Arkansas Delta Byways, Inc., a tourism promotion association serving 15 counties in Eastern Arkansas. The



association manages and promotes two National Scenic Byways in the region: the Crowley's Ridge Parkway and the Arkansas segment of The Great River Road. Dr. Hawkins has served in various administrative capacities at Arkansas State University for 37 years. She holds a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri, a Master's degree in Political Science from Arkansas State University and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Mississippi. Dr. Hawkins also teaches classes in the Heritage Studies Ph.D. program at Arkansas State University and is chairman of the Arkansas History Commission, a state advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a technical advisor to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, and a member of the Arkansas Tourism Hall of Fame. She is the recipient of numerous state and national preservation awards, including the Parker Westbrook Award for Lifetime Achievement through the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas. Her book, Unbelievable Happiness and Final Sorrow: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Marriage, is the only biographical work on author Ernest Hemingway's relationship with the Pfeiffer family of Piggott, Arkansas.

## LATE SESSION: Small Business as Economic Development

**Cornell Wesley, Financial Services Manager, EAPDD:** Cornell brings 12 years of experience in business lending, credit analysis and management to his role at EAPDD. He began his career in banking as a financial center manager with Bank of America in Atlanta, Georgia. He subsequently moved to Suntrust Bank (Atlanta) where he worked in various positions of increasing responsibility over a two-year period in its Small Business and Investment department including time as a middle market lender, small business banker, and investment consultant. As SBA lender with CBC National Bank, Cornell managed a 49-state lending territory generating over \$20 million in annual loan production. He has held various other roles within the banking industry including: multi-unit manager, trainer, consultant, and government liaison. Cornell is involved with the NEA United Way, serves as Board Member to KLEK-FM Radio Station Jonesboro AR, is a Board Member to the Volunteer Lawyers Foundation of Atlanta GA, Habitat for Humanity, and is active with the Greater Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church Global Ministries (Birmingham AL). He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Morehouse College, Master of Divinity from Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta GA), and an MBA from Mercer University (Atlanta GA).



**Terrance Clark, Co-Founder of Thrive, Helena, AR:** Hailing from Bloomington, Illinois, Terrance obtained his BFA in Graphic Design from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2005. After working in the exhibit/signage design industry he obtained his Master's degree in Design Management at Pratt Institute, NYC, in 2009. Terrance serves as the Director of The Helena Start-Up Program and he manages the business administration and development activities at Thrive. As a co-founder of Thrive, Terrance works with new and existing business owners in Phillips County to develop their long-term business plans and marketing strategies. Terrance's ability to work with small-business owners and his personal creative background make him uniquely qualified to lead Thrive.

**Laura Miller, Center Director, ASU Small Business and Technology Development Center:** Laura has been with the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center at Arkansas State University for nearly 15 years. As part of the ASU College of Business, the SBTDC provides training, consulting, and information research to small businesses and entrepreneurs in 15 counties of Northeast and North-Central Arkansas.



In September 2000, Laura joined the Center as Training Coordinator. She

later became a Business Consultant, then Lead Business Consultant and finally in 2014, Center Director.

In 2008, Laura was named “State Star” for the Arkansas Small Business Development Center network at the National ASBTDC conference. She holds a FastTrac Facilitator Certification with the Kauffman Foundation; a Certified Business Advisor designation from the University of Toledo; and a Certified Global Business Professional designation from NASBITE (National Association of Small Business International Trade Educators).

Prior to joining the ASU SBTDC, Laura was a business counselor for the Pittsburg State University Small Business Development Center in Kansas. She has held positions in the areas of economic development, insurance, and banking.

Laura received a B.S. degree in Business Administration from the University of Missouri and a Masters of Business Administration from Pittsburg State University. She and her husband are business owners and reside in Jonesboro, Arkansas with their two children.

**Katie Milligan, Special Assistant for Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Delta Regional Authority:**