

# HEALTHY ACTIVE ARKANSAS CASE STUDY

## City of Batesville

Obesity causes or exacerbates numerous chronic diseases and conditions that can lead to death, including diabetes and hypertension. In an effort to address the obesity epidemic in Arkansas — which affects more than one-third of adults in our state — the governor-led Healthy Active Arkansas (HAA) initiative provides a 10-year framework with phased goals to increase the percentage of Arkansans who are at a healthy weight. The HAA plan is comprised of nine priority areas in which individuals and communities can take action to encourage and enable healthier lifestyles. Supported by funding from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) convened 10 meetings in 2017 and 2018 to engage, recruit, and activate a network of local champions to assist in meeting these goals. This study is part of a series of case studies highlighting success stories from the HAA Statewide Learning Network. Visit [achi.net](http://achi.net) for more resources, including additional case studies and a template for creating an action plan for your community.

### HEALTHY ACTIVE ARKANSAS STATEWIDE LEARNING NETWORK

During the network's first year, ACHI hosted meetings in Jonesboro, McGehee, Little Rock, Clarksville, and Magnolia. In an effort to reach other areas of the state and expand the network, ACHI held an additional five meetings in Springdale, Mountain Home, Hot Springs, El Dorado, and Helena-West Helena in 2018. More than 460 city and county officials, hospital executives, superintendents, college administrators, community advocates, and others joined the network to make their communities healthier and more active places to live, work, and play. Network members developed more than 175 action plans to create change in at least one of the nine priority areas. Each action plan identified strategies and key partners necessary to reach the desired outcome, as well as potential barriers.

At the learning network meeting in Jonesboro, Batesville Mayor Rick Elumbaugh highlighted his city's policy efforts and health initiatives in partnership with local organizations. The HAA priority areas addressed by these health initiatives include:

- Priority 1: Physical and built environment; and
- Priority 9: Marketing program.

## **CITY OF BATESVILLE HEALTH INITIATIVES**

Situated in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains on the White River, Batesville is a city that has experienced steady growth over the last two decades, with the most recent U.S. Census population estimate nearing 11,000. Batesville is the county seat of Independence County, which consistently ranks in the top third of Arkansas counties for health outcomes, according to the annual County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. Batesville and surrounding areas in north central Arkansas are clinically supported by the White River Health System. Prior to becoming mayor of Batesville in 2007, Elumbaugh spent more than 30 years teaching physical education and health in Batesville schools and coaching in Desha schools (prior to the Desha School District's merger with the Batesville district). "I've always had a passion for working out, recreation, and fitness," Elumbaugh said. "It's just been a part of my life." Elumbaugh also managed the Batesville municipal swimming pools for more than three decades, starting when he was a sophomore at Arkansas State University. While teaching in Batesville, he started one of the first mountain bike programs in a school system nationwide and the first in Arkansas.

Following some early success replacing critical wastewater infrastructure for the city, Elumbaugh turned to his passion for physical activity and health. "We started with community gardens," he said. "Then we got a grant to start our greenway trail." Each year since then the city has applied for grants to expand and connect the trails, and, according to the mayor, they have been very successful. "We have an open grant right now to secure all the easements," he said. "We're trying to connect the schools, the parks, and the community."

In August 2010, Elumbaugh took a \$50 million sales tax measure to Batesville voters to support the development of a new community center, aquatics park, and other recreational facilities

including athletic fields. The measure fell short by only 70 votes. “It was like a death in my family. I was devastated,” Elumbaugh said. The mayor returned in 2012 with a scaled-down measure. “We planned to purchase less land for our athletic fields adjacent to the current ones. One thing we didn’t do, though, is scale back on the community center, and we actually enlarged it,” he said. The second effort was successful, garnering a 60 percent favorable vote.

### COMMUNITY CENTER AND SPORTS COMPLEX

After the measure was approved, Elumbaugh toured community centers across Arkansas and in St. Louis and Branson, Missouri. “It’s like building your first home,” he said. “It may be the last home you build, and it’s probably going to be 50 to 100 years before the opportunity strikes again.”

Elumbaugh focused on the capacity to draw volleyball tournaments and swim meets. “It was partly about the economic benefit of having a health and wellness facility to draw those types of events, but primarily about the quality of life for the community.”



**Outdoor recreational pool at the community center.**

The community center includes a 28,000-square-foot gymnasium with options for up to three basketball courts, six volleyball courts, or nine pickleball courts; full-service kitchen; group fitness studio; fitness center; four meeting and two board rooms, all audio/visual-equipped; natatorium with heated therapy pool, children’s pool and competition pool with timing equipment; outdoor pool with a 440-foot lazy river, two 25-foot spiral slides, zip line, diving board, and 16-person whirlpool; and rental space for parties and events. Funding from the ballot measure also supported construction of seven new baseball fields for ages 7–13, with designs based on Major League Baseball fields, and three smaller fields for tee-ball and youth softball.



**Indoor track in the community center.**

Since opening, the community center has garnered membership of more than 75 percent of the community, peaking at more than 8,400 members in summer 2018. “It’s been a game changer and life-changing for so many individuals,” said Elumbaugh. “If there’s one thing that’s made me very proud, it’s the change in [the community’s] health and wellness.”

#### MAIN STREET

The city obtained renderings for a transformed Main Street in 2012 through a partnership with a local bank. In collaboration with America Walks, the city focused on creating a safe, accessible, and walkable environment. The city narrowed the street to a single, one-way lane and improved crosswalks and sidewalks. The street has undergone irrigation, lighting, and curbing improvements, seen the development of two new parks and the filling of 17 empty storefronts, and hosted 12 farmer’s markets annually.

## NEXT STEPS

In 2017, the city finished its comprehensive master trails plan. “Our next step on the trails is to connect Lyon College with Main Street,” Elumbaugh said. Projects currently under consideration include installation of a new water slide and construction of a lifeguard room at the community center, improvements to previously existing fields at the sports complex, and development of a dog park. Elumbaugh is also eyeing the potential of a community arts center. “We’ve got a pretty strong arts community,” he said, “and we have to build a community for everyone.”

## LEARN MORE ABOUT

- Healthy Active Arkansas: <https://healthyactive.org/>
- City of Batesville: <https://www.cityofbatesville.com/>

Note: This case study includes information provided by Batesville Mayor Rick Elumbaugh and Parks Director and Assistant Director Jeff Owens.