

THE PROGRESS REPORT

A Newsletter of the Arkansas Black Mayors Association

The Arkansas Black Mayors Association, established in 1972, is a non-profit, charitable, and educational organization.

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As we enter November, the Month of Giving, this edition highlights the generosity, leadership, and impact of Arkansas's Black mayors and the communities they serve. From advancing infrastructure and economic growth to fostering civic engagement and community well-being, these stories showcase how giving through service, collaboration, and vision, drives lasting progress.

Welcome

The Arkansas Black Mayors Association remains steadfast in its mission to build stronger, and more resilient communities. Together, we continue to stand United for Progress.

Altheimer Honors Mayor Zola Hudson for Over a Decade of Dedicated Leadership

The city of Altheimer came together to celebrate Mayor Zola Hudson, recognizing more than a decade of steadfast leadership, service, and commitment to the community. The special Appreciation Day honored her tireless efforts to improve the lives of residents and strengthen the city she has long called home.

Throughout her tenure, Mayor Hudson has been widely praised for her dedication to civic engagement, community development, and local initiatives that enhance both the economic and social well-being of Altheimer. **Her leadership has helped guide the city through challenges, while fostering a sense of pride among residents.**

The Appreciation Day brought together, the community, city officials, and local leaders, all expressing their gratitude for her decades of service. As ABMA celebrates Mayor Zola Hudson's enduring contributions, her legacy of service stands as an example of how committed leadership can inspire meaningful change and lasting progress in small communities across Arkansas.



Branching out for a Better Tomorrow



Across the Arkansas Delta, communities came together for Planting Marianna Day and Planting Elaine Day, hosted by the Arkansas Black Mayors Association through the Arkansas Delta Community Forestry Project. The events united residents, local leaders, and volunteers to promote sustainability, beautify neighborhoods, and strengthen community pride.

In Marianna, Mayor Ora Stevens led volunteers in planting native trees such as Red Oak, White Oak, and Red Maple. **"Each tree we plant today strengthens our community, providing beauty, cleaner air, and hope for generations to come,"** she said.

The effort continued in Elaine, where Mayor Lisa Hicks-Gilbert guided another day of planting and unity. "This isn't just about trees," she said. "It's about planting hope and a stronger future for our town and the Delta."

The project underscores the vital role trees play in cooling cities, improving air quality, and uplifting neighborhoods. Together, Marianna and Elaine are helping create a greener, more sustainable Delta, one tree at a time.

For more information, contact Project Manager Candace Williams at 870-770-5214 or scan the QR code to learn more.



Marianna, AR.



Elaine, AR.

Arkansas Black Mayors Association Unveils Next Step in Watershed Project

The Arkansas Black Mayors Association, in partnership with Mayor Joseph Whitfield of Helena-West Helena and Mayor Lisa Hicks-Gilbert of Elaine, recently hosted a joint press conference to announce the commencement of the design phase for the ABMA Watershed Project for their respective cities. Community members, local leaders, and state officials gathered to celebrate this significant milestone in a regional initiative aimed at improving water infrastructure and advancing sustainability throughout the Delta.

The ABMA Watershed Project represents a collaborative effort among municipal leaders, residents, and engineering firms dedicated to developing long-term, equitable solutions that strengthen environmental resilience, promote economic growth, and ensure a healthier future for Arkansas communities. **"This project marks an important step toward building sustainable infrastructure that supports both our people and our environment,"** said Mayor Joseph Whitfield. Mayor Lisa Hicks-Gilbert added, **"Through partnerships like this, we can bring real, lasting change to the Delta region and beyond."**

The Arkansas Black Mayors Association remains committed to fostering regional collaboration and advancing initiatives that promote environmental justice and enhance community well-being across the state.



Watershed
Improvement Project™
by Arkansas Black Mayors Association

Wrightsville Confronts New Challenges After Dollar General Closure

The recent closure of Wrightsville’s only store, a Dollar General on Highway 365, has left the small town without a central source for groceries and essentials. For more than a decade, the store served as a lifeline for residents in a city with no banks, gas stations, or grocery stores.

City officials said the closure came abruptly, without consultation, and their attempts to contact the company have gone unanswered. Despite strong community petitions, Dollar General did not reverse its decision.

The loss comes as part of the company’s national downsizing plan following a 32% drop in profits. Still, locals insist the Wrightsville store was well-used and vital to daily life.

City leaders are now pursuing new solutions, working with Rock Region Metro to restore bus service to nearby stores and seeking a \$1.5 million grant to attract new businesses. For Wrightsville, the closure is a challenge but also a rallying point for resilience and renewal.

ABMA Annual Meeting Announcement

Join us for the Arkansas Black Mayors Association Annual Meeting at

Rock It! Lab
120 River Market Avenue
Little Rock, AR 72201

Thursday **DEC. 4** 1p.m. | Friday **DEC. 5** 10a.m.

Connect with fellow leaders, share insights, and shape the future of Arkansas communities. We look forward to your participation!

A New Chapter of Hope and Leadership in Helena-West Helena

There’s a renewed sense of optimism stirring in Helena-West Helena, a community rooted in history and resilience, now looking toward a brighter future. That spirit has found new leadership in Joseph Whitfield, recently appointed by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders to serve as Mayor.

For Whitfield, this isn’t just a new role, it’s a homecoming. Born and raised in Helena, he has always carried a deep love for the people and potential of his hometown. He is committed to working every day to strengthen the neighborhoods, support local businesses, and create new opportunities

for development. Governor Sanders expressed confidence in Whitfield’s ability to bring positive change, describing him as “a new face with big ideas and bold solutions” ready to meet Helena-West Helena’s challenges head-on. Whitfield’s journey to this point reflects dedication and service. A graduate of KIPP Delta Collegiate, Colby College, and Relay Graduate School of Education: New York, he’s spent nearly a decade in education, shaping young minds as both teacher and assistant principal. His leadership later expanded into community development through his work as Executive Director for Delta Magic and the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce, where he built partnerships to strengthen local business and highlight the Delta’s rich cultural and economic promise.

Now, as Mayor, Whitfield is channeling that same passion into shaping a future where Helena-West Helena thrives. His focus is clear, to deliver results that improve lives, foster growth, and build a strong foundation for generations to come. Helena-West Helena stands at a pivotal moment, and with Mayor Joseph Whitfield, the city’s next chapter promises to be one of unity, progress, and renewed purpose.



Mayor Joseph Whitfield

Honoring Our Member Mayors: A Look Back at the 2025 ABMA Gala

As we look back on this year’s Gala, our hearts are full of pride and gratitude for the incredible dedication of our mayors across Arkansas. This year’s celebration honored the remarkable work these leaders do every day to strengthen communities, uplift residents, and spark meaningful change throughout the state. The evening came alive with a captivating performance by the Westwind School for the Performing Arts, followed by a lively band that set the tone for a night of joy, reflection, and inspiration.

One of the evening’s most memorable moments was the fireside chat featuring Phyllis Dickerson, Chief Executive Officer of the African American Mayors Association (AAMA), alongside Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott Jr. and Wrightsville Mayor Derrick Rainey. Their conversation went beyond accolades and statistics. They shared personal stories, lessons learned, and visions for building stronger, more resilient communities. This year’s Gala was more than an event; it was a testament to the growth and unity of ABMA. As we look forward to next year, one thing is certain, the ABMA Gala continues to shine as a source of inspiration and hope for Arkansas communities everywhere.

