



SURVEY INDICATES IMPROVING

Crystal Bridges, The Jones Center attendance increases, survey shows

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A 2019 survey shows Northwest Arkansas residents' use of indoor amenities such as Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, The Jones Center and the Walton Arts Center has risen since 2015. The percentage of NWA residents who reported attending Crystal Bridges at least once in the last 12 months increased significantly from 2015 to 2018, according to the Northwest Arkansas Quality of Life Survey Report. Since 2015, Crystal Bridges attendance went up 8%, Walton Arts Center attendance decreased 3% and The Jones Center attendance went up 17%. Chung Tan, the business development manager for the City of Fayetteville's economic vitality department, said the growing number of indoor entertainment centers in Fayetteville has improved the economy as well as the health of residents. "One of the city's goals, of course, is to look after the health and happiness of our citizens. So, in a sense, these sectors help to contribute positively towards this end," Tan said. Crystal Bridges was ranked as the most visited arts and culture facility, with 71% of surveyed residents having attended at least once in the last 12 months. Specifically in Fayetteville, 67% of residents attended Crystal Bridges in 2018, compared to 53% in 2015. Diane Carroll, chief commu-



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nications and marketing officer at Crystal Bridges, said the museum receives around 600,000 visitors per year, and she attributes the jump in attendance rates to the large variety of exhibitions and public programs that Crystal Bridges offers. Crystal Bridges also organizes lectures, art-making workshops, film screenings and gallery talks. Raquel Gamboa, a freshman, visited Crystal Bridges for the first time with her parents two months ago. She mainly went to gather information for a class project. "We had to go to an art mu-

seum, or an exhibit, and look at the art and do a report on it, so I went there one week-end," Gamboa said. "Since I am doing interior design, I liked seeing the building, like the architecture of the building itself." Resident income level appears to affect attendance rates for most area amenities – even free facilities, such as Crystal Bridges, according to the survey. Of wealthier residents making \$200,000 or more a year, 88% attended Crystal Bridges at least once a year, while 56% of residents making less than \$10,000 a year

attended at least once a year. From 2012 to 2018, the attendance rate of residents making less than \$10,000 a year has increased from 11% to 56%. Carroll thinks the attendees match the diversity and the income ranges of the museum's audience, she said. The report noted a decrease in the percentage of residents visiting the Walton Arts Center, 45% in 2018, and 48% in 2015. Given its location on Dickson Street, this finding is likely influenced by attendance rates among university students with zero or negli-

gible direct income, according to the report. Jennifer Wilson, the Walton Arts Center's public relations director, said the five-year average for attendance at the Walton Arts Center is 96,000 visitors who attended at least one show over the seasons. She also said that since the Walton Arts Center opened 27 years ago, many other amenities have opened in NWA to provide options to the residents. "I think one of the important things to look at in the survey is the fact that the Walton Family Foundation has sur-

veyed and not only are there multiple cultural organizations in NWA, but we are all healthy," Wilson said. "Some of us have had a little bit less attendance over the last couple of years based on that survey." Renovations on the Walton Arts Center from July 2015 to November 2016 affected attendance, said Scott Galbraith, vice president of programming. The renovation included the extension of the main lobby toward Dickson Street, increasing of the Starr Theater's capacity to 250 and constructing new spaces that can be used for event and wedding rentals, community space or configured for smaller productions. Attendance also fluctuates depending on the programming, Galbraith said. The two week-round performances of the Blue Man Group in September resulted in a growth in the number of visitors by 9,000 people. Proximity also had an effect on whether residents used a particular amenity. For example, more Bentonville and Springdale residents reported visiting Crystal Bridges and the Jones Center at least once in the past 12 months. Kirk said the increase in attendance is a result of marketing efforts, additional programs and the affordable price. From 2015 to 2018, visits to The Jones Center increased by about 63%, according to the survey. The Jones Center recreation facilities, including the ice arena, gym, fitness center and pool, had 297,315 uses during 2018, said Director of Recreation Michael Kirk.

Associate Editor Andrew Elkins contributed to this report.

Changes coming to outdoor recreation in Northwest Arkansas

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This year's Walton Family Foundation survey found that outdoor recreation use is continuing to rise in Northwest Arkansas and shows residents' use of facilities such as trails and parks. Nine hundred and sixty-six Northwest Arkansas residents were surveyed, indicating that the most popular amenities include parks, trails and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, according to the survey. Eighty-one percent of citizens reported using parks, closely followed by Crystal Bridges at 71% and trails at 70%. Ken Eastin, Fayetteville Parks and Recreation park planner and landscape architect, said that there are many projects underway in Fayetteville. There will be an increase in biking trails before the summer of 2020, specifically at Kessler Mountain and Millsap Mountain, Eastin said. Gregory Park's newest trail and parking lot additions were underway for two years and were recently finished. Devil's Den, Hawksbill Crag, Millsap Mountain, Lincoln Lake, Mount Kessler, and Niokaska Creek, are among the many popular local outdoor attractions, Eastin said. "NWA is leading in that charge," Eastin said, "but it is

definitely leaking out into the state." Fayetteville City Council approved plans April 9 for a Cultural Arts Corridor, a 50-acre public area connected natural and urban space, which costs over \$31 million. The Cultural Arts Corridor will link places such as the Fayetteville Public Library and the Walton Arts Center, according to Fayetteville Parks and Recreation. The Walton Family Foundation's Design Excellence Program gave a grant for the construction of the Cultural Arts Corridor. The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art was found to be one of the most popular attractions in the Walton survey, with 71% of NWA residents attending in 2018, a 29% increase since 2012. Beth Bobbitt, Crystal Bridges' media relations director said she thinks Crystal Bridges has stepped up its game for those interested in trails and mountain biking. "Our mission is to connect people to art and nature," Bobbitt said. Crystal Bridges was designed to deliberately introduce nature between outdoor exhibits and remind attendees of the outdoors when inside, Bobbitt said. Employees of Crystal Bridges have been working on expanding their outdoor scenery, Bobbitt said. The North Forest Lights exhibit, an exhibit that highlights qualities of the forest using light and sound, opened Oct. 26, according to Crystal Bridges.

The Momentary, an outdoor visual and performing arts venue that has been in progress since 2017, will be completed in February 2020. "We are always looking for new ways to utilize our space, and there are always new artworks coming into the outdoors," Bobbitt said. For the first time since 2001, the Parks and Recreation Department's strategic plan is going through changes as well, Eastin said. "There will be a city-wide analysis of how we are meeting recreation needs," Eastin said. "As our population increases, there are increased needs. It's just a matter of figuring out what those needs are."



Cayden Hartman Staff Photographer

Gerardo Aguilar, a graduate student, bikes to Lake Fayetteville on Nov. 2 as a form of personal exercise and practice for the UofA cycling club.



Cayden Hartman Staff Photographer

Lake Fayetteville is a popular fishing location for NWA residents. Those wishing to fish must have a permit.