

# VELOCITY

JULY 2021 • OKCCHAMBER.COM

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CHAMBER

## EMPLOYERS ENCOURAGED TO CONSIDER HIRING THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED

In 2018, Oklahoma had a reported 43,000 people behind bars in various facilities across the state with one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation. Things have improved, but more can still be done to reduce the state's prison and jail population. One way is by developing programs to reduce recidivism among former inmates who need a job and who truly want to be productive members of society.

There is currently a concerted effort among OKC-area leaders to encourage more businesses to hire the formerly incarcerated, often referred to as justice-involved individuals. That would bode well for a company's

## NEW PROGRAM LAUNCHED TO SUPPORT COMPANY INCLUSION EFFORTS

The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City have announced the next program in their strategic partnership, Inclusion at Work, a collaboration of diversity leaders in Oklahoma City's companies.

Inclusion at Work will bring together the leaders and managers of diversity programs in companies across the region to identify areas of collaboration and partnership. "As we continue to survey and meet with companies on how to best meet their needs, we learned that many are

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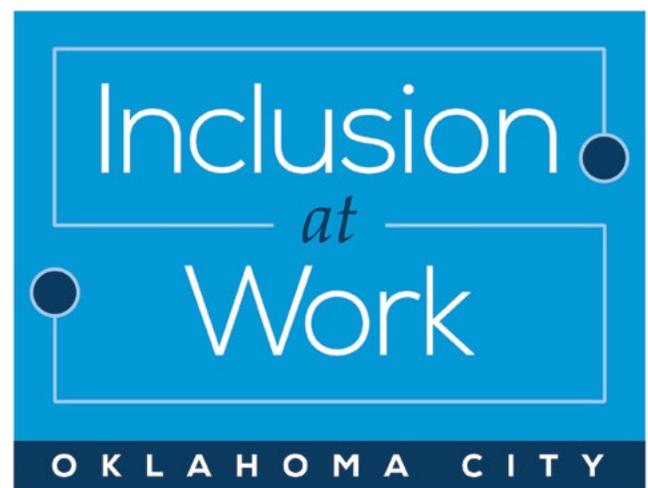
bottom line as the lack of available talent is one of the biggest challenges facing businesses today.

Joe Ely, who currently serves as director of business & industry for Moore Norman Technology Center, said during his previous job with the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, they helped place thousands of justice-involved individuals with various employers.

"As folks get out of prison, they are needing a job and needing to re-enter society and needing some way to support their families and themselves; they need a chance. And they're available. As far as employers looking to hire those folks, that is a great untapped resource," Ely said.

Michael Bowling, attorney, Crowe & Dunlevy, represents employers in various human resources employment law matters. He said many employers' hiring policies are slightly rooted in fear instead of information, and may be illegal.

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“Dr. Burkhart is really smart, because he went to a lot of schools.”



**Our doctors taught the class and wrote the book on children's healthcare**

At only 6-years-old, Liam is very well versed in matters of the heart. Born with a congenital heart defect, Liam has had three open heart surgeries under the expert care of Harold Burkhart, M.D., Oklahoma Children's Hospital's nationally-renown chief of pediatric cardiothoracic surgery. With expert pediatric surgeons like Dr. Burkhart, kids like Liam can receive world-class care close to home, surrounded by the people who love them.

Oklahoma Children's Hospital OU Health is the leader in pediatric care for Oklahoma and the region. Make an appointment with a pediatric specialist today by calling (405) 271-2222 or visit us online at [OklahomaChildrens.org](http://OklahomaChildrens.org).

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# LEADERSHIP NOTES

OKLAHOMA CITY IS BACK TO BUSINESS

I am not sure there is another major metro that is bouncing out of the pandemic with as much energy and enthusiasm as we are right here. From the return of some of our favorite events, to the opening of new businesses and new attractions, there is a lot to be excited about right now. Here are my top five things you should be talking about:

- Oklahoma City's economy is moving. And Oklahoma City's sales tax receipts are hitting all-time peak numbers. Our residents are back at work – our unemployment is at 3.4% and is the 12th-lowest among large metros.
- Oklahoma City has been hard at work during the pandemic and there are a number of new facilities that are open and ready for you to enjoy, including Oklahoma Contemporary, the new Oklahoma City Convention Center and the new Omni Hotel.
- There are also projects under way right now that will open in the next six months. Leading the way are the First Americans Museum and the renovated First National Center.
- Oklahoma City's center of outdoor recreational activity, RIVERSPORT, has added two unique activities to the slate – surfing and skiing. Whether it is in a boat, on board, on wheels, on skis or even just your own two feet, there is an adventure for you in the Boathouse District.
- And finally, we are back together enjoying everything our city has to offer. From the Festival of the Arts, to concerts, and Chamber events later this month, we are all working together to make this an even greater place. Go to the Chamber's website at [okcchamber.com](http://okcchamber.com) and register for our events today!

Roy H. Williams, CCE  
Chamber President & CEO



Roy H. Williams, CCE  
President & CEO

**VELOCITY**  
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"INDEPENDENCE DAY EVENTS IN GREATER OKC"  
[VELOCITYOKC.COM/ROYSPICK](http://VELOCITYOKC.COM/ROYSPICK)

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summer with new attractions

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## CALENDAR

(Events are subject to change. Consult [okcchamber.com/events](http://okcchamber.com/events) for the most recent updates.)

### JULY 21

**Chamber Forum**  
11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Location: Vast,  
333 W. Sheridan Ave.  
[okcchamber.com/julyforum](http://okcchamber.com/julyforum)

### JULY 27

**Chamber Connection**  
1 to 2:30 p.m.  
[okcchamber.com/connect](http://okcchamber.com/connect)

### AUGUST 6

**Enlighten**  
11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
[okcchamber.com/enlighten](http://okcchamber.com/enlighten)

### AUGUST 11

**State of the Schools**  
11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
Location: National Cowboy &  
Western Heritage Museum,  
1700 NE 63rd St.  
[okcchamber.com/schools](http://okcchamber.com/schools)

### AUGUST 18

**Chamber Forum**  
11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Location: Vast,  
333 W. Sheridan Ave.  
[okcchamber.com/augustforum](http://okcchamber.com/augustforum)

### AUGUST 25

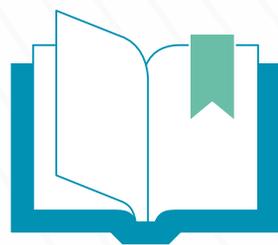
**Chairman's Breakfast**  
8 to 9:30 a.m.  
Location: TBD  
[okcchamber.com/chairmansevent](http://okcchamber.com/chairmansevent)

### SEPTEMBER 10

**Enlighten**  
11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
[okcchamber.com/enlighten2](http://okcchamber.com/enlighten2)

### SEPTEMBER 15

**Chamber Forum**  
11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Location: Vast,  
333 W. Sheridan Ave.  
[okcchamber.com/septemberforum](http://okcchamber.com/septemberforum)



# STATE OF THE SCHOOLS

## State of the Schools returns to in-person event; Hofmeister featured speaker



Joy Hofmeister

The annual State of the Schools will return in 2021 as an in-person event on Aug. 11 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. The event is scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Aimed at learning about efforts and ideas to improve education in Oklahoma, this year's State of the Schools will feature several education leaders representing various levels of instruction in Oklahoma, including State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister, who will be the featured speaker.

Hofmeister has served in the state superintendent's role since January 2015. *Additional speaker to be announced.*

Hofmeister has championed a host of education reforms during her tenure designed to improve public education in Oklahoma, including a repeal of the federal education law known as No Child Left Behind, the strengthening of the A-F school accountability system and many other reforms.

State of the Schools will also include a panel discussion about workforce development programs that are

preparing students to have successful college and professional careers. Serving on this panel will be several Oklahoma City-area education leaders:

- Chris Brewer, Superintendent, Santa Fe South Public Schools
- Chip Carter, President & CEO, Cristo Rey Oklahoma City Catholic High School
- Michelle Keylon, Ed. D, Superintendent/CEO, Francis Tuttle Technology Center
- Jeanie Webb, President, Rose State College

Individual tickets are \$50 for Chamber members and \$75 for nonmembers. Sponsor tables of eight with additional recognition are available for \$1,500. Contact Suzette Ellison Jordan at [sellison@okcchamber.com](mailto:sellison@okcchamber.com) for table sponsor inquiries. Masks will not be required but are encouraged, especially during networking time.

To register or learn more, visit [okcchamber.com/schools](http://okcchamber.com/schools).

Special thanks to Presenting Sponsor the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, School Supply/Centerpiece Sponsor American Fidelity Assurance Company and Host Sponsor Cox Communications.

## *Tinker AFB Sustainment Center topic of July Chamber Forum; Lt. Gen. Kirkland featured speaker*



*Lt. Gen. Donald E. "Gene" Kirkland*

Lt. Gen. Donald E. "Gene" Kirkland, commander of the Air Force Sustainment Center at Tinker Air Force Base, will be the keynote speaker for the July 21 Chamber Forum that will be held in person from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Vast, which is located on the 50th floor of the Devon Tower.

This marks the Forum's first in-person event since the pandemic forced chamber officials to temporarily suspend all live gatherings in early 2020. Since that time, the monthly forums have been held online.

Kirkland, who has led the sustainment center since August 2018, will update the business community on

the ongoing growth of the Sustainment Center and what we can expect in the next few years. As the AFSC commander, he leads 40,000 airmen across three air logistics complexes, three air base wings and two supply chain wings, operating from a global network of 26 locations.

Registration for the July Chamber Forum is \$35 for Chamber members and \$55 for nonmembers. To register or learn more, visit [okcchamber.com/julyforum](http://okcchamber.com/julyforum).

The Chamber's successful Forum series, which is held on the third Wednesday of the month, brings thought leaders together to discuss major initiatives, programs and current issues that impact Oklahoma City's business climate, economy and community.

Special thanks to Presenting Sponsor Cox Business and Corporate Sponsor ADG.

## *Workplace absenteeism and its legal impact topic of Enlighten event*

The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's next Enlighten event, scheduled for Aug. 6 from 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. via Zoom, will examine absenteeism and absence management in the workplace.

During this online event, attendees will hear valuable insights and tips from law experts from Chamber member GableGotwals, a full-service law firm based in Oklahoma City, on how to deal with these issues from a human resources standpoint and what legal implications to consider. Ellen Adams and Paula Williams, both shareholders at GableGotwals, will be the featured speakers.

Adams' practice primarily consists of defending corporate and individual clients in a wide variety of complex business litigation in state and federal courts,

with an emphasis on employment law. Williams represents employers in a wide range of labor and employment law, including claims involving wage and hour disputes, family/medical leave, sexual harassment, retaliation, age, race, pregnancy and disability discrimination, and wrongful termination.

Enlighten events are free and available to both Chamber members and nonmembers, providing networking and practical resources to help boost your business performance.

Special thanks to Series Presenting Sponsor Cox Business.

For more information or to register, visit [okchamber.com/enlighten](http://okchamber.com/enlighten).

### **WOULD YOU LIKE TO HOST A CHAMBER EVENT?**

As the Chamber moves back to in-person events, we are seeking event host sponsors for the remainder of 2021 and beyond. Chamber members who have meeting or banquet facilities and are interested in showcasing their venues are invited to submit proposals. Host sponsorships allow you to open your company's doors to a built-in audience of connected business professionals. Specifications for each event and instructions on how to submit a proposal are available online at [okcchamber.com/hostsponsor](http://okcchamber.com/hostsponsor). Contact Meredith Manley, director of events, with questions at [mmanley@okcchamber.com](mailto:mmanley@okcchamber.com).

## TOURISM TRAVEL SECTOR REBOUNDED NEAR PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS



*More than 15,000 people attended various conventions in Oklahoma City this year from April to June, including inside the new Oklahoma City Convention Center shown here.*

The NCAA Women's College World Series that concluded last month in Oklahoma City drew what will most likely be record crowds inside USA Hall of Fame Stadium. The late decision by the NCAA to increase capacity to 100% no doubt played a huge role in that increase, especially after a new upper deck was completed in 2020 that essentially added an extra 4,000 seat, bringing total capacity to about 12,000 people.

Included in those likely record crowds were thousands of softball fans from cities across the state and nation. They typically stay the whole week of the series, spending money on food, hotels, area attractions and shopping. An additional number of outside visitors also came to Oklahoma City in May as part of the Big 12 baseball and softball championships, adding to the amount of money spent recently in OKC.

Zac Craig, president of the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau, said from a leisure tourism standpoint, signs indicate the city is well on its way to a recovery from the pandemic.

"If we examine the most recent data, which is the month of May, our hotel partners saw a 58% occupancy rate citywide. That compares to 66% for the same month in 2019. So, we are less than 10 percentage points from pre-pandemic levels as it relates solely to occupancy in our hotels," Craig said.

That occupancy rate should rise even further once the June figures are released.

"We just got some reports from ESPN that the Women's College World Series was the most viewed series ever. I think we are going to see a big spike month over month as it relates to these demand generators from Big 12 baseball and softball, and certainly from the Women's College World Series," Craig said.

Despite the increase in tourism travel Oklahoma City saw this spring – and continues to experience during the summer months – business travel and group travel are still lagging, however. Craig pointed to several contributing factors for this discrepancy, including

travelers' concerns about being close to other people, especially in large groups or airplanes, as well as their uncertainty if whether people have been vaccinated or not. Still, Craig believes consumer confidence in both groups is climbing, which in turn will lead to even more visitor spending in Oklahoma City."

Our lead volume from our convention sales sector here at the CVB has actually just exceeded in the month of May where we were in May of 2019. That is a very exciting stat for me. In addition, the leads themselves look different. They are bigger, and a lot of that business is new business," Craig said, noting that more than 15,000 people have attended various conventions in Oklahoma City this year from April to June.

"I see a lot of activity picking up over the next several months, not only from our business travel community but also for our convention center and at our hotels. Our task and our challenge with being the new stewards of new infrastructure – and that is not only the Oklahoma City Convention Center but also our streetcar, Scissortail Park and the surrounding areas – is that we built this infrastructure to go capture new business and extend our reach. And so we are laser-focused on that mission here at the CVB, and I am excited about sharing new business as we court them and as we confirm them for future years," he said.

## SECOND CHANCE EMPLOYMENT

(CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

“A lot of employers still have policies that state they won’t hire anybody with a felony or criminal conviction. It is important for employers to know that those are illegal policies. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s guidance provides that that kind of over-broad policy actually is what we call disparate impact on people in minority communities and violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Bowling said.

Jenna Morey is executive director of ReMerge of Oklahoma County, a pre-trial diversion program that helps mothers facing non-violent felony charges. She said the number one reason why someone is likely to reoffend is joblessness.

“If we can take care of joblessness and we can put people to work, then we not only heal those families and those people we are putting to work, we help stop the cycles of intergenerational incarceration but also heal our communities while also contributing to our economy. It really is not just a win, win; it’s a win, win, win, win,” Morey said, noting that approximately 40 companies have recently signed up with ReMerge to be second-chance employers.

Formerly incarcerated himself for 21 years, Doug Shaffer, who is director of operations at Scissortail Waste Solutions, LLC, said 47% of his current workforce are second-chance individuals.

“When you give them an opportunity or allow them to have a job that is more than just digging a ditch or working in construction, something that is meaningful or an in-demand career, they are the best people. They will be some of the most committed and loyal people you have. They are my target population, and I want to give them a chance like the one I received [when I was released from prison],” Shaffer said.

There were two primary obstacles Shaffer said he faced when he was searching for employment following his release: societal bias and not being given a fair opportunity.

“I understand why people have those fears and concerns, but in my particular case, most people I have interviewed with, that bias is unfounded. Just because I had a background, people would just dismiss you. I received multiple, very high-level job offers over the last 10 years until a background check. Once they ran a background check, there was no discussion, and they would withdraw the job offer,” Shaffer said.

Shaffer said he could understand a company’s apprehension to hire someone with a criminal background, especially if the job function was sensitive to the applicant’s background.

“You don’t want a child molester working with children or a drug dealer working at a pharmacy or a bank robber in a bank. But if the background is not relative to the job function, there should be more than just an absolute no,” he stated, adding that most people do not even know what information is included in their background checks.

For many businesses that have embraced second-chance hiring and have made it part of their overall hiring practices, they are discovering that justice-involved employees are typically very loyal, hard workers with high productivity and high morale, and good problem solvers.

“It is not just a 9-5 job but a source of pride and purpose in their lives that they may have never had before,” Morey said.

Various resources are available for businesses or organization that are interested in second-chance hiring. The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Advisory Council (CJAC), with assistance from Moore Norman Technology Center, recently developed a resource guide or tool kit that provides helpful information to employers, such as the legal implications and guidelines for hiring justice-involved individuals as well as tips they can use to help the interviewing and hiring processes go more smoothly. That tool kit can be found at [velocityokc.com/blog/economy/chamber-releases-fair-chance-hiring-toolkit](http://velocityokc.com/blog/economy/chamber-releases-fair-chance-hiring-toolkit).

***“It is not just a 9-5 job but a source of pride and purpose in their lives that they may have never had before.”***

*Jenna Morey,  
ReMerge executive director*

## Q&A WITH THE CHAMBER'S JEFF SEYMOUR AND EVAN FAY ABOUT gENER8TOR AND gBETA COMING TO OKC

Nationally ranked startup accelerator gener8tor along with the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and several Oklahoma City-area partners, including American Fidelity Assurance Company, Inasmuch Foundation, Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores, Oklahoma State University Foundation, Square Deal Capital and the University of Oklahoma, recently announced they will offer two annual gBETA pre-accelerator programs in OKC beginning in October to help accelerate the growth of startup companies in OKC. VeloCity staff sat down with the Chamber's Jeff Seymour, executive vice president of economic development, and Evan Fay, program manager of innovation and entrepreneurship, to learn more about gBETA and its expected impact on Oklahoma City's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### Tell us how the idea of gBETA came about.

**EVAN FAY:** We have a lot of really great resources to serve entrepreneurs, founders and small businesses here. But the unique thing about gBETA for us was just that they operate on a national stage, thus allowing participant companies to have access to a national mentor pool, a national customer base, to national sources of investment capital. This doesn't necessarily go above and beyond what is being done here by local support organization, but supplements what is being done here. It broadens the pool of resources for entrepreneurs and Oklahoma City companies. And hopefully this acts as an attraction mechanism for some founders that maybe have applied for our program but don't live in Oklahoma City.

### How did you hear about gener8tor?

**EVAN FAY:** They are the highest-ranked program of this type that still has kind of a Midwestern feel. We were introduced to the gener8tor team through leadership

from local coworking space StarSpace46. The gener8tor team came here just to see what Oklahoma City was like, and I met up with them while they were here. That kind of started the conversation over the last two years of what would it look like to have a program here: 'What is involved in funding it? What is involved in helping you all start day one with as many relationships and kind of a road map for success?' So, it was kind of a combination of primarily research and relationships that has led us to this point."

### Why is the Chamber leading this work?

**JEFF SEYMOUR:** From a Chamber perspective, we know that leading in economic development must include leading partnerships and initiatives focused on innovation, entrepreneurship and new sector development. Especially coming out of the changes of the last 18 months, we know those economies that can pivot, be iterative and develop new internal growth will be the winners. We feel that taking a lead in filling gaps, including finding and launching new programs to source a bigger pipeline of ideas, was a good position for our efforts, running in tandem with supporting other local programs. We see our work as collaborative and representative of bigger picture conversations the community must have around economic growth.

### Why do you think there is a need for something like this in Oklahoma City?

**EVAN FAY:** Within Oklahoma City we know there is a need for more resources to serve all types and stages of start-up companies. No one program can provide all types of assistance to meet the needs of entrepreneurs. Examples of gaps we want to continue to address includes helping local students develop a business plan for their idea, helping a founder through the customer discovery

process, or preparing founders for a capital raise and making investor introductions to a broad base of funders. One of the most important pieces of the pipeline is creating a framework where people feel that if they have an idea, there is a place where they can go to put it through its paces – to test their hypothesis. gBETA will provide that tried-and-true framework in addition to programs that exist here. Particularly exciting to us is there will be companies that are incubated from the universities that go through this program. So, we will act as more of a pipeline for college students that may have built a business during their college tenure to now get plugged in to the Oklahoma City startup community in a more formal way.

**JEFF SEYMOUR:** I agree with Evan's comments; we have great local partners doing work in the entrepreneurial/innovation environment (i2E, Stitchcrew/the Thunder Launchpad, StarSpace 46, etc.) but to be successful long term, we have to have more resources to help more types of ideas get launched, funded and stay here locally. No one program can serve all the needs in the market.

#### Once gBETA is fully operational, how will it work?

**JEFF SEYMOUR:** There are a couple of different components. One is we hire a full-time director who is out in the market all the time looking for new ideas and networking and building rapport in the overall marketplace. He or she is not meant to be in the office but rather in the community, building this space and being partners with all the existing players.

**EVAN FAY:** Once the director position has been filled, there will be an application process for companies to go through, which is pretty competitive. They interview the applicants and then admit five companies into the program. They will build a mentor team around those companies, followed by targeted programming focused on fund raising, customer acquisition, e-commerce and ways to deliver the product or service. Upon graduation, there will be a demo day where the community can come and see these companies present their product or service. There will be a nationwide network of investors, both in person and virtual, who will attend that event.

#### How will gBETA impact Oklahoma City's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

**JEFF SEYMOUR:** gBETA is meant to be complementary. We see it as being present in a lot of things we are all present at, bringing some ideas from

other markets where gener8tor operates. And then hopefully, at some point, turn to Oklahoma City to focus on our ability to be a center of excellence in some individual technologies and think about accelerator programming long term.

**EVAN FAY:** We certainly don't feel like this is an end-all, be-all solution by any stretch, but we know this is a tenured program. It's built on a scalable and repeatable model that will allow our existing resources and organizations that serve startups to specialize and keep doing what they do best. We hope founders from other markets come here, participate in the program and then realize there is a community here that wants to wrap their arms around them, keep them here and help them find customers, mentors and money, if that is what they are looking for. I think it will continue to elevate Oklahoma City as a place where entrepreneurs can grow their business. But the thing that really excites me is making sure there are as few barriers as possible to success for founders from all backgrounds.



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## RIVERSPORT FULLY OPENS FOR SUMMER, INTRODUCES MORE UNIQUE ATTRACTIONS

More people in the Oklahoma City metro are venturing outside this summer, particularly as the pandemic's severity lessens and pent-up demand for outdoor activities rises. One local outdoor attraction that has been the beneficiary of this uptick in activity is RIVERSPORT OKC.

“One thing that we did learn through COVID is that being outside and being active is one of the best things you can do,” said Mike Knopp, executive director of RIVERSPORT Foundation, a 501(c)(3) foundation and owners of RIVERSPORT OKC.

Located in the Boathouse District just south of downtown and Bricktown on the north shore of the Oklahoma River, RIVERSPORT is a regional outdoor recreational destination that features zip lines, a ropes course, bungee jumping, a bike park, rock climbing walls, kayaking and rowing, whitewater rafting, tubing and the tallest dry slide complex in the U.S. There are also camps and a nature center where visitors can see many varieties of snakes, lizards, turtles and other crawling creatures.

Knopp explained that even though RIVERSPORT was open for business in 2020 when the pandemic was still going strong, they were restricted with what activities they could offer to guests. The facility is now fully open, however, and people are responding accordingly, even from other states.

“I talked to a couple from Kansas City just the other day, and they were overwhelmed with what they saw here and wished they had something like it back home,” Knopp said. “It’s a very unique attraction that’s in our own back yard. Sometimes it’s good to get that outside perspective of just how unique and world class it really is,” he said, describing RIVERSPORT as more of an outdoor lifestyle experience rather than a theme park.

Two of the newest attractions at RIVERSPORT that have come online since the pandemic started, and which are already receiving rave reviews, are Surf OKC and Ski OKC. Surf OKC opened late in 2020, while Ski OKC opened last month. Both attractions provide visitors, regardless of skill level, a unique opportunity to surf or ski without having to travel to Colorado or Southern California.

Because it opened so late in the year in 2020, Knopp said Surf OKC is still new to most people. For those people who have already tried it, they have really enjoyed the experience. And many have already become regulars to the attraction.

“It’s super fun, but it’s also skills based so you can keep coming out and get better and better. You can either boogie board or you can actually stand up and surf,” said Knopp, who explained that visitors surf on endless waves on a trampoline-like surface.

Knopp said Surf OKC has been so popular that RIVERSPORT will be hosting the state’s first-ever pro-am surfing competition at the end of July.

“We have some pros coming in and we will have opportunities for other people to compete. You can just sign up, and there will be a novice category,” he said.

Because of the success of Surf OKC, officials wanted to create yet another unique experience for visitors coming to the park. Adding skiing to the mix was a good complement; thus, Ski OKC was introduced.

Ski OKC is an indoor simulated ski slope featuring a quick inclination system that allows the slope to change from a less challenging run to a more challenging run, or vice versa, within seconds. The surface is covered in a specially developed artificial ski grass that is misted with water to create a feel similar to that of real snow. Guests

will wear normal skis and boots just as if they were on a real slope. If you prefer to snowboard, those are also provided by the facility.

An added ramp offers the opportunity to practice jumps and a projected ski course offers slalom practice. Advanced augmented reality capabilities ensure the experience will continue to expand as technology advances, according to Knopp.

“You can work on learning to ski here, and it will actually make you a better skier as get you ready for the actual slopes in Colorado or elsewhere,” Knopp said.

Knopp said they are gearing up for the summer with various events, including the Super Cup August 20-21, which will be televised to an international audience.

“The Olympic champions in paddle sports from the Tokyo games will come to Oklahoma City and race under the lights, and there will be a race in the whitewater center as well. It is probably the highest-profile event we have ever had,” Knopp said.



*Ski OKC is one of the new attractions featured at RIVERSPORT in the Boathouse District.*

## OKC CHAMBER LAUNCHES ‘STAND TALL, SHOP SMALL FOR OKC’ CAMPAIGN THIS SUMMER

As July begins, the Chamber is once again kicking off its “Stand Tall, Shop Small for OKC” campaign. With the help of OKC’s district leaders, the Chamber wants residents to give a much-needed boost to the small businesses that make the city unique.

“It is no secret that small business plays a huge role in the economic vitality for any community. In fact, statistics show the majority of new jobs are generated by small businesses. So, it is critical that we, as Oklahoma City-area residents, do what we can to help our local small businesses, especially after what they experienced and fought through during the pandemic,” said Chamber President and CEO Roy H. Williams, CCE.

Directors from the city’s districts have expressed their excitement about the campaign, especially as many areas see more of their businesses begin to open. Because each director knows their district the best, each district is encouraged to promote the campaign in a way that fits their area.



The Stand Tall, Shop Small for OKC campaign will coincide with a similar statewide campaign by the Independent Shopkeepers Association called “Weekend of Local” that is planned for the weekend of July 23-25.

The Chamber will promote its Stand Tall, Shop Small for OKC campaign and the various district activities on its social media accounts, which can be found on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. People are encouraged to get downloadable social media assets, signage and more info at [velocityokc.com/shopsmallforokc](http://velocityokc.com/shopsmallforokc), use the #ShopSmallForOKC hashtag, and to follow the districts’ social media accounts as well to keep up with their activities. A complete list of the districts, their top things to do and their attractions can be found at [visitokc.com/about-okc/okc-districts](http://visitokc.com/about-okc/okc-districts).

## INNOVATION DISTRICT STARTING TO MAKE ITS CASE NATIONALLY



Last December, two of the city's leading developers, Gardner Tanenbaum and Robinson Park Investments, announced plans to build two facilities within the Innovation District near NE 8th and Interstate 235 that will, when finished, comprise more than 400,000 square feet of useable space. The project is aimed at bringing together research and development from Oklahoma City's leading industries in order to share ideas that will lead to the creation of new companies, new inventions and other technological breakthroughs.

Katy Boren, president and CEO of the Innovation District, and her team have been busy lately as they continue the work of promoting the district and its potential to help transform Oklahoma City's economy. She said a key feature in the district will be a space dedicated to an Innovation Hall.

"We are on a path to create an ecosystem in our city where people have an identifiable source, an identifiable epicenter and a location where they know to go plug in to collaborate, innovate and commercialize ideas. And with additional state-of-the-art and public facilities and development in that area, that just enhances that ecosystem and those assets to where we will meet, and even exceed, those expectations," Boren said.

Boren said in years past, bioscience researchers and entrepreneurs in the Innovation District typically remain in the labs or offices with little opportunity to collaborate on similar projects or technologies with diverse industries like aerospace and energy. There was no ecosystem that just organically happened around cross-cutting technologies related to the region's leading industries, she said.

"You can walk into another city like Austin, Texas, and know immediately where to plug in. You physically know



*Rendering of projects approved for the Innovation District.*

where to go to be in the central hub for collaborators and innovators, find the programming and events to connect, and access the ecosystem built around the research, academics, industry and talent, but we did not have that here in Oklahoma City," she said.

She and her team have been busy promoting the Innovation District locally and nationally in recent months – speaking on various nationwide panels and presenting to conferences and associations – to tell the Innovation District story and communicate the great assets, including facilities and expertise, Oklahoma City possesses. They have even ramped up their own programming by providing a variety of social and subject-matter-driven events both in the daytime and evening. There is a monthly newsletter, as well as a social media presence to keep stakeholders apprised of their events and other newsworthy accomplishments.

"Across the country the Oklahoma City Innovation District is becoming known for our leading research, as well as the clusters of assets and experts and talent we have here. They are also interested in the state-of-the-art facilities we currently have or that are coming. It is a very compelling package with all of the elements that appeal to entrepreneurs and investors that will drive our next-generation economy" Boren said.

## OKLAHOMA'S CITY'S MMAC COMPLETES MAJOR TRANSITION FOR SHARED SERVICES

Oklahoma City's FAA Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center continues to grow in stature as a leading shared service provider to federal agencies across the country, having just completed a major transition to bring financial and procurement services for the Office of Personnel Management into its system.

"The Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center has a long history of financial management and shared services for other federal agencies," explained Center Director Michelle Coppedge. "The Center's Enterprise Services Center currently performs financial management services for 35 different federal agencies. Financial system services are the core offering of the ESC, complemented by security, system management and procurement services."

The 20-year history of success in the operation attracted OPM to the Center. "We really bring an economy of scale to the agencies we serve," explained

Coppedge. "We can lower the overall fixed cost for an agency and save money for our customers, particularly for any agency with older systems. The cost to buy and convert to a new system can be very high, and we can really help customers by integrating them into our ESC financial systems."

The services center first began working with OPM in 2017, providing hosting services for the agency. The conversion of the financial and procurement system was accomplished over the last two years and was finally completed just last month.

"The completion of our migration to ESC's Delphi platform marks a major milestone in our commitment to be a leader in the federal government for financial management. It also demonstrates the results that can be achieved when federal agencies collaborate on delivering solutions to serve the American taxpayer," said Dennis Coleman, OPM's chief financial officer.

Coppedge said the size of this project and its success is already having a positive impact on the service center's operations. "The addition of OPM, which is such a large customer, really grows our base and lowers the cost for all of the customers in our portfolio," she said.

## INCLUSION AT WORK (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

looking for guidance around the continued growth and development of their diversity and inclusion programs," explained Rhonda Hooper, Jordan Advertising, vice chair of business and economic inclusion. "There is a strong desire to work with other businesses to understand their best practices and use that experience to accelerate their own programs. We have companies that are at all stages of development from just starting out to having established and sophisticated initiatives, and they all express interest in working together."

A recent survey of companies found a variety of concerns. A number of companies are new to the process and need guidance. Others have employees skeptical of change and are looking for ways to build trust. Another group is made up of smaller companies looking to create a program with appropriate scale for their size.

"The one common thread that came through the comments in the survey was the desire to work together to create community around these issues," said Hooper. "I was encouraged because I know when Oklahoma City comes together with a goal, we make things happen. I look forward to what we can accomplish."

The Chamber and the Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City created a partnership last year aimed at creating a stronger dialogue and engagement of the Oklahoma City business community around issues of social justice and anti-racism. This program is an outgrowth of that effort.

Topics that will be covered include building out measurement and accountability tools, resources to improve climate, recruiting and retaining diverse talent, training and leadership development, and employee resource groups.

The group will hold its first meeting on August 3. If you are interested in attending, please contact Cynthia Reid, [creid@okcchamber.com](mailto:creid@okcchamber.com), or 405-297-8942.

# WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Businesses who join the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber are part of the largest coalition of businesses in the state and make the Chamber's work in the community possible. Each member level is identified on the listing below.

## ADVISOR

### City of Warr Acres

*Government Agencies & Services*  
The Honorable James Mickley (405) 789-2892  
4301 N. Ann Arbor Ave.  
Warr Acres, OK 73122-4310  
[www.warracres-ok.gov](http://www.warracres-ok.gov)

## ADVISOR

### Sooner Investment

*Real Estate*  
Mr. Christopher N. Challis ..... (405) 842-0456  
2301 W. I-44 Service Road, Suite 100  
Oklahoma City, OK 73112-8766  
[www.soonerinvestment.com](http://www.soonerinvestment.com)

## ASSOCIATE

### Salt Real Estate

*Real Estate*  
Mr. Barrett Huffmyer ..... (405) 839-7070  
1508 W. Edmond Road  
Edmond, OK 73003-6301  
[salt.realestate](http://salt.realestate)

## CORE

### Bin There Dump That

*Waste Management & Disposal*  
Mr. Jason Roberts ..... (405) 640-4345  
3301 N. Santa Fe Ave.  
14900 Kurdson Way  
Edmond, OK 73013-2424  
[www.okcdumpsterrental.com](http://www.okcdumpsterrental.com)

## CORE

### Network Security Group, Inc.

*Information Services*  
Mr. John Lucich ..... (844) 350-0384  
1992 Morris Ave., Suite 183  
Union, NJ 07083-3507  
[www.nsgj.com](http://www.nsgj.com)

## CORE

### 35 Degrees North

*Apartments*  
Ms. Cynthia Schwartz ..... (405) 724-6030  
2800 NW 192nd St.  
Edmond, OK 73012-9142  
[www.35degreesapts.com](http://www.35degreesapts.com)

## CORE

### Tiff's Treats Cookie Delivery

*Bakeries*  
Ms. Michelle Pilo ..... (405) 838-1490  
505 E. Sheridan Ave., Building 1, Suite 1  
Oklahoma City, OK 73104-6702  
[www.cookieelivery.com](http://www.cookieelivery.com)

## CORE

### VillagesOKC

*Nonprofit / Service Agencies*  
Ms. Marilyn Olson ..... (405) 990-6637  
3980 N. Peniel Ave., Suite 340  
P.O. Box 721033  
Oklahoma City, OK 73172  
[www.villagesokc.org](http://www.villagesokc.org)

## CORE

### WhitbeckBennett

*Attorneys / Lawyers*  
Ms. Amber Godfrey ..... (405) 655-5733  
1901 N. Classen Blvd., Suite 222-1  
Oklahoma City, OK 73106-6015  
[www.wblaws.com](http://www.wblaws.com)

## GRAND OPENINGS

Congratulations to Chamber members on their recent Grand Openings! To see the schedule of upcoming Grand Openings or subscribe to the Grand Openings calendar, visit [okcchamber.com/grandopenings](http://okcchamber.com/grandopenings).

### Rodeo Cinema on Film Row

2221 Exchange Ave.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73108

### True Sky Credit Union

5029 North Martin Luther King Dr.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73111

# ECONOMIC INDICATORS

## OKLAHOMA RANKS NO. 2 WHERE \$100,000 IN RETIREMENT SAVINGS LAST LONGEST

### TOP STATES WHERE RETIREMENT SAVINGS OF \$100K LAST LONGEST

RANK	STATE	ANNUAL EXPENDITURE	\$100,000 WILL LAST...
1	MISSISSIPPI	\$38,435	2 YEARS, 7 MONTHS, 6 DAYS
<b>2</b>	<b>OKLAHOMA</b>	<b>\$40,403</b>	<b>2 YEARS, 5 MONTHS, 21 DAYS</b>
3	MICHIGAN	\$40,586	2 YEARS, 5 MONTHS, 17 DAYS
4	ARKANSAS	\$40,631	2 YEARS, 5 MONTHS, 16 DAYS
5	ALABAMA	\$40,631	2 YEARS, 5 MONTHS, 16 DAYS

Source: GOBankingRates, June 2021. A rank of 1 is most favorable. Study did not account for social security.

- Among all U.S. states, Oklahoma was ranked as the second best state where \$100,000 in retirement savings would last the longest.
- \$100,000 in retirement savings in Oklahoma would last two years, five months and 21 days, assuming a total annual expenditure of \$40,403.
- The study also noted that \$1 million would last 24-and-a-half years in retirement in Oklahoma City, making it one of the most affordable U.S. cities for retirees.

For comprehensive Economic Indicators and Regional Data, please visit your Greater Oklahoma City Chamber Economic Development Division at [greateroklahomacity.com](http://greateroklahomacity.com) or contact Eric Long, Research Economist – 405-297-8976; [elong@okcchamber.com](mailto:elong@okcchamber.com)

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