

## Chapter Two: Community Character

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Community character is unique to each city. It is comprised of many elements including social institutions, events, built spaces, and demographics. The actions of leaders and citizens influence whether the needs of the community are identified, and how those needs are addressed. Actions that are taken, and those which are not, in and of themselves also serve to define the character of the community.

### **2.2 VISION**

The members of the community along with its institutions, private organizations, and government, will work together to preserve and enhance the unique and diverse character of Arkansas City to ensure the qualities that individuals and families are looking for, including good education, a safe environment and the ability to form and develop meaningful relationships.

### **2.3 COMMUNITY CHARACTER - PEOPLE & COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Arkansas City is a mid-size community having both a rural and urban character. Many people enjoy living in a community the size of Arkansas City and seek communities like Arkansas City where they can know each other and feel safe. They enjoy the benefits of a community with historical buildings and small-town amenities and culture. Arkansas City fits this bill with an attractive downtown center, a thriving commercial corridor through town, industrial partners, good schools and excellent opportunities to enjoy natural and cultural resources. Many people would like their communities to have the atmosphere which Arkansas City has, while still being very accessible to metropolitan areas such as Wichita.

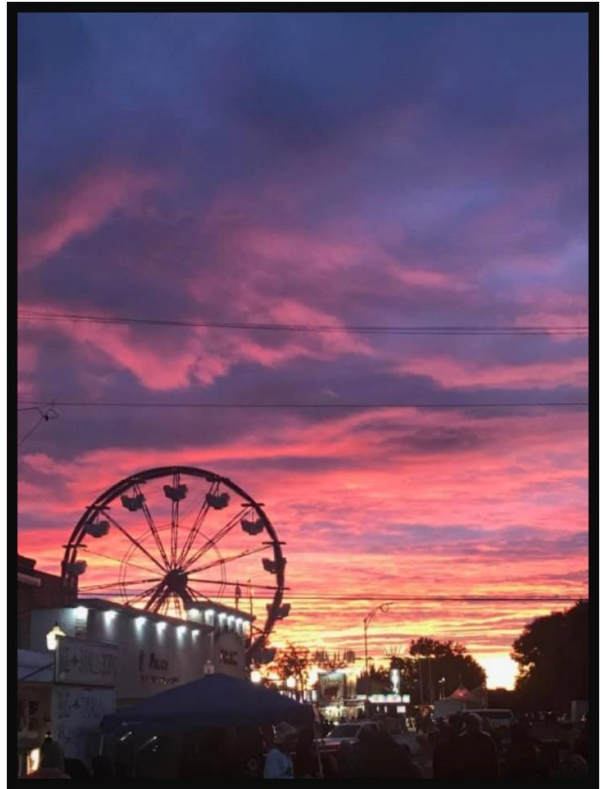
Special events bring community members together and contribute to the culture and character of the city. Events celebrated community-wide in Arkansas City include Halfalalah, Tacolalah, Arkalalah, and Last Run Car Show. Arkalalah, a Native American word that means “good times”, is the largest annual community festival. It has been celebrated in Arkansas City since 1928. The Car Show is another favorite annual event in the community, with as many as 1000 antique and styled cars on display.



Entertainment options exist in Arkansas City, and are frequently found at the historic Burford Theater and the Brown Center at Cowley College. Those facilities provide a range of theater and performing arts experiences. The Brown Center holds 800 people, and among the national speakers and entertainers who appear there are Grammy Award winners and other notable acts and persons. The Burford is a 900-seat auditorium that was restored with a \$4.2 million restoration enabled through private fundraising. This effort is further testimony to the value the Burford has for the community. These two venues also create opportunities for tourism.

Like many communities in Kansas, holidays and other community celebrations become common experience for citizens, connecting them to each other across differing backgrounds, ages and interests. In Arkansas City there are community band concerts in the summer, bike runs spring through fall, a youth fishing derby, farm and art markets, home, garden and craft shows, event luncheons and banquets. Holiday celebrations include Easter egg hunts, parades, and the festival of trees and a miniature village on display at Christmas time.

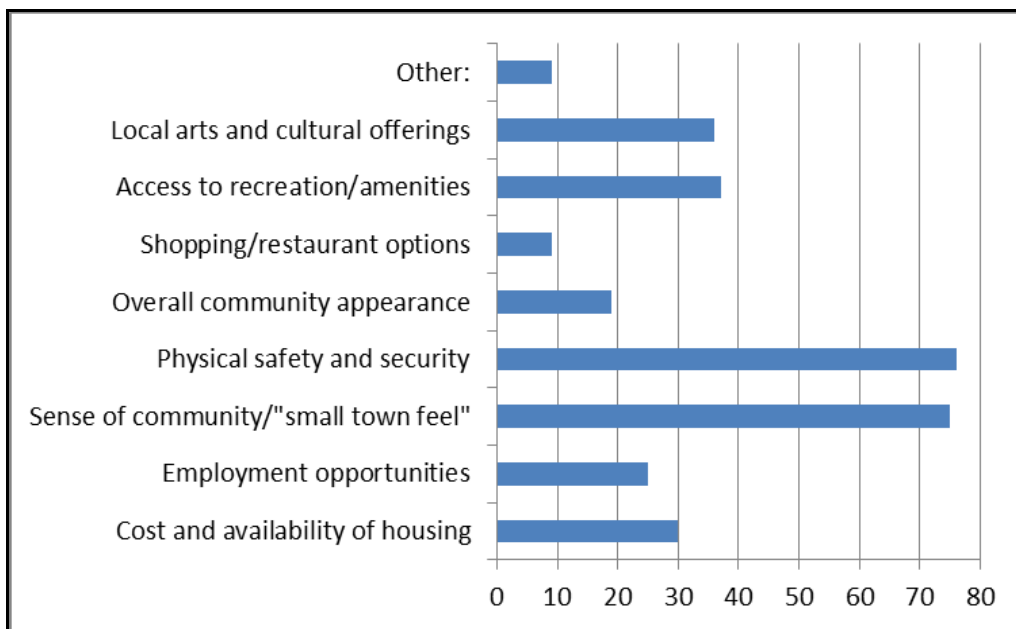
Arkansas City was home to former Kansas Governor Robert Docking. Professional sports figures include Darren Daulton (baseball), Lionel Hollins (basketball), and Leslie Miller, (football) who were born in Arkansas City. Another notable former resident was actress Elizabeth Taylor, who lived in the community for one summer as a child.



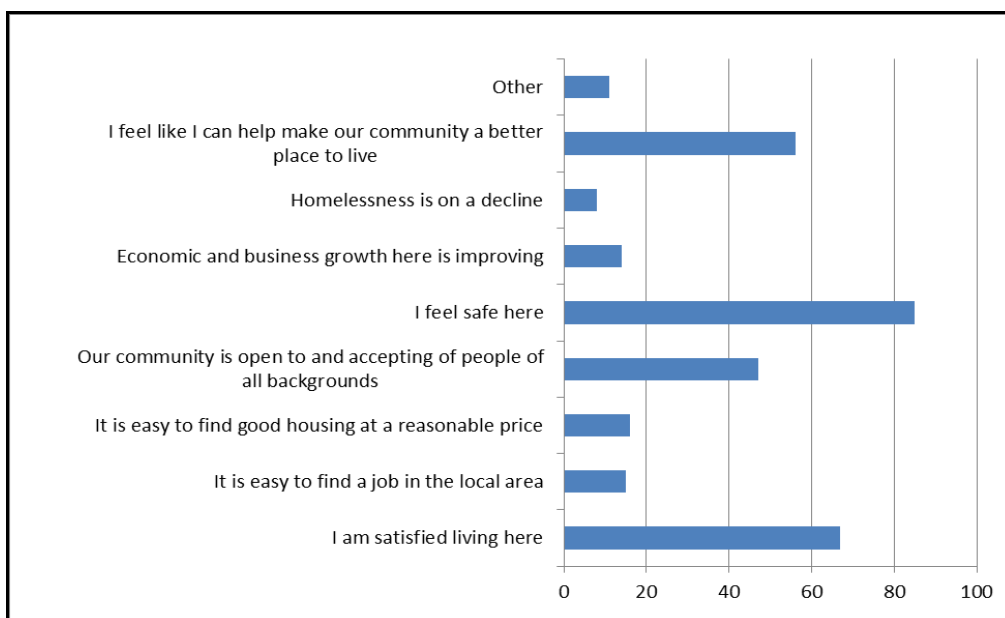
## 2.4 COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

In the results of the FlashVote survey conducted in February 2021, citizens were asked to consider quality of life and to identify their most important reasons for living in Arkansas City. The response most often given illustrated the importance of feeling safe, as it was “physical safety, security”. The second most-cited response was “sense of community/small town feel”, again demonstrating qualities Arkansas City has which many people seek.

When asked in the 2021 Needs & Priorities FlashVote survey to respond to a question regarding the strengths of Arkansas City. Respondents were asked to select all that applied).

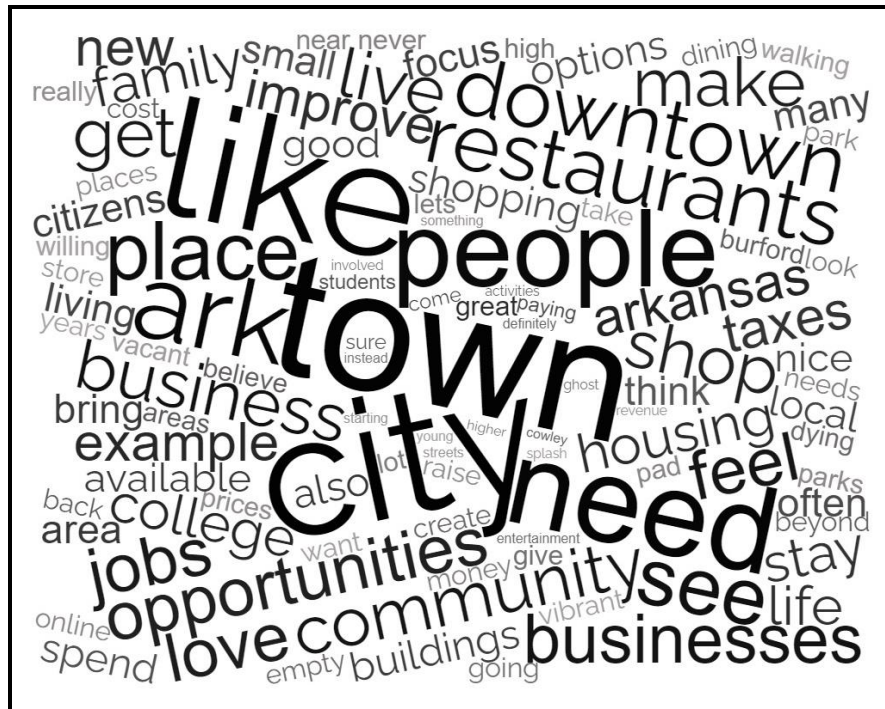


The survey also asked about priorities. Respondents gave the greatest support to “Local business development/growth” while maintaining infrastructure and keeping up the community appearance also gained a lot of support.



Other questions asked had similar results. Finally, a question asked for additional comments about quality of life in Ark City and also asked if they would change anything. Key words such as town, city,

people, downtown, need and restaurants were prevalent which helps to indicate things that are important to citizens and also the identity of our city starts to show up.



Word cloud courtesy of wordclouds.com

## 2.5 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

## Government

Citizens are represented by five elected commissioners comprising the City Commission. Commissioners are elected at large, meaning they do not represent a specific area, but rather the whole community. The Mayor is elected annually by the commission, from the commission membership. The form of government is City Manager/Commission and has been in place since 1930. The community is served by a professional manager who serves at the will of the City Commission, and who is responsible for the day to day management of the departments and staff of the city. The city employs approximately 130 persons among five departments: Environmental Services, City Manager, Fire/EMS, Police, and Public Services. City Hall is located downtown at 118 W. Central Avenue.

## *Municipal Services*

The city provides water, wastewater, and sanitation services to businesses and households in the community, as fee for service operations.

In 2019, the Public Works Department was split into two separate departments, Environmental Services and Public Services. The Parks & Facilities Division was also combined with the Public Services Department. The Neighborhood Services Division was combined with the City Manager Department.

The Environmental Services Department is responsible for water treatment and distribution, wastewater collection, treatment and meter reading. Public Services is responsible for street maintenance, storm drainage, sanitation and cemetery maintenance as well as parks and facilities maintenance.

The City Manager Department provides utility billing, municipal court, information technology. It also houses the Neighborhood Services Division which is responsible for building maintenance and construction, code enforcement and animal control. Arkansas City has adopted the ICC 2015 International Codes as its construction standards for remodeling and new construction projects. Current codes are: 2014 National Electric Code; 2015 International Building Code, Residential Code, Plumbing



Code, Mechanical Code, Fuel Gas Code, Fire Code, Property Maintenance Code, Existing Building Code, the Kansas Uniform Disaster Building Damage Assessment Inspection and Recovery Plan, and the 1997 Uniform Code for Abatement of Dangerous Buildings.

The Arkansas City Police Department is located at 117 W. Central. There are 31 staff members who work for the department, including 27 certified officers and 4 non-sworn staff members. ACPD provides a wide range of police services to the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Sworn officers perform police services that include patrol, answering calls for service, traffic enforcement, criminal investigations, traffic crash investigation and a host of public service activities. Non-sworn staff members provide the department with administrative assistance, records management and property/evidence storage.

The Arkansas City Police Department partners with the United School District 470 in Arkansas City to provide two School Resource Officers. They are assigned to the Middle School and High School. These officers provide prevention programming that includes D.A.R.E. which is taught in district 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. The School Resource Officers also provide specialized programming to include National Night Out, New Year's Eve Party, and D.A.R.E. Camp.

The department also has a Mental Health Officer, who is responsible for conducting follow up and outreach to citizens suffering from mental health crisis. This position will also assist domestic violence victims with seeking local services that will positively impact their situations.

Our department values community interaction. "Connecting with the community, it's kind of our thing," best defines our approach to everyday policing. ACPD values independent decision making and problem-solving strategies. Using a community oriented policing philosophy; our department has fostered strong partnerships with our schools, faith-based community, civic organizations, business community and citizens. We strongly believe that preventing crime is a community effort and it is our role, as the Police Department, to provide the information necessary to help our citizens take an active part in reducing crime and traffic crashes. Every member of the Arkansas City Police Department is committed to our Values, Mission and Promise.

### ***Fire/EMS Protection***

Emergency response for medical calls or fire is by the City Fire/EMS department located at 115 South D Street. Its staff is comprised of 24 personnel. The Fire Protection Class for Arkansas City and its rural area depends upon location. The urban area rating is a very good 4, an indication of the department's quality firefighting capability, including staffing, equipment and water availability in Arkansas City. Portions of rural areas are served by Cowley County Fire District No. 5 with a rating of 8B. This rating applies to properties beyond 1000 feet of a fire hydrant but within five road miles of the fire station.

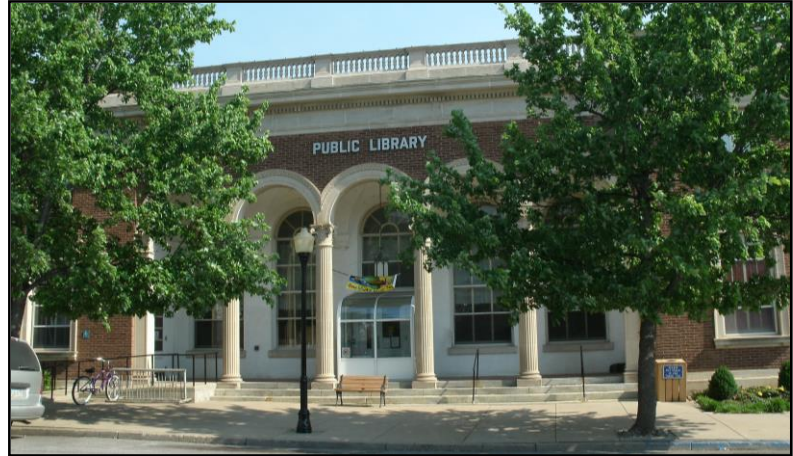
The City Fire/EMS department provides advanced life support to the city and nearby rural areas of unincorporated Cowley County, along with portions of Sumner County. It is staffed by paramedics and emergency medical technicians at all times. In addition, the department has a



technical rescue team to specialize in rescue incidents like confined space, building collapse, swift water or high angles rescue.

### ***Public Library***

The Arkansas City Public Library (ACPL) is located at 120 E 5th Avenue. It opened at that location in November 1980, with a significant renovation in the early 2000s. The Library's mission is to provide library resources and services to meet the changing recreational, informational, and educational needs of the public, to enhance individual and community life. As a recreational and popular materials library, materials of high interest and demand are provided to



persons of all ages. As an information and reference library, answers and materials are provided to the questions of individuals of all ages. As an educational and learning center, support and assistance are provided to patrons who are pursuing both formal and independent learning.

## **2.6 EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Children and youth living within the local school district attend one of nine public schools operated by USD 470 for their education needs, from pre-school through 12th grade. In addition to public school, there are three private schools. Arkansas City is also home to Cowley College, a community college and vocational/technical school serving the post-secondary needs of over 6,000 students.

### ***USD 470***

USD 470 Board of Education members, administrators, teachers, and staff members are committed to providing an excellent education for all students. The district strives to provide effective instructional leadership and quality learning environments to promote improved student outcomes. USD 470 holds high expectations for students and staff and shares with the community the responsibility for preparing all students to live, work, and continue learning in an ever-changing world.

The district focuses on providing a well-rounded education that incorporates rigorous academic study, social-emotional learning and wellness, family involvement, and future-focused plans of study customized for each student. Other goals include maintaining facilities, encouraging open two-way communication, hiring and retaining quality staff, 1:1 technology integration, early childhood programs, and graduate success. Total enrollment of USD 470 for the 2020-2021 school year was 2,773 which includes students in Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade.

In 2008, USD 470 voters approved a \$35.8 million-dollar bond issue for additions and renovations of all school buildings, technology updates, a new stadium at the high school and other sports complex improvements. This bond issue also funded improvements such as HVAC systems, early childhood classrooms, ADA access, fiber-optics, and FEMA-approved storm shelters for both school and public use.

### ***District Office***

The current administration office, located at 2545 Greenway was purchased in 2008. The building was then remodeled for the offices of the superintendent and other administrative professionals.

**High School** –The current Arkansas City High School facility opened in January 1983 and is located at 1200 W. Radio Lane. Students in grades 9-12 attend there and in 2020-2021, enrollment totaled 771. Arkansas City High School is very proud of its class offerings and its various opportunities for students to become involved in athletics, activities, and student organizations. The average composite ACT score in 2020-2021 was 17.8 (Arkansas City began testing a *substantially larger percentage* of students), so this average will improve over the next two to three years. A strong indicator of improvement is the graduation rate which moved upward from 77.4 percent in 2019 to 86 percent in 2020. For athletics, the High School is a Class 5A school in the Ark Valley Chisholm Trail – Division 2 League. Competing against substantially larger school districts, ACHS teams consistently qualify for postseason competition in a number of sports. The ACHS activities program is large, offering broad opportunities in co-curricular experiences for students. Programs in the Arts are recognized statewide for a traditional standard of excellence and accomplishment.



**Middle School** – Arkansas City Middle School, located at 400 E. Kansas Avenue, opened in 1967 and was renovated in 2010-11. Students in grades 6 through 8 attend middle school and in 2020-2021, enrollment totaled 660. The middle school offers a variety of academic, athletic, and activity opportunities for students to explore and find success. One popular offering is the KAY Club - a community service-oriented program focused on character-building, leadership training, and volunteer opportunities.

**Elementary Schools** – There are six elementary schools in USD 470. These schools house students in grades PreK through fifth, provide full-Kindergarten classes, and also serve as FEMA-approved storm shelters for the community. 2020-2021 enrollment for each site was as follows:

- Adams Elementary - 1201 North 10<sup>th</sup> Street - 284
- C-4 Elementary - 11945 292<sup>nd</sup> Road (east of town) - 112
- Frances Willard Elementary - 201 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street - 248
- IXL Elementary - 6758 322<sup>nd</sup> Road (south of town) - 194
- Jefferson Elementary - 131 Osage Avenue - 275
- Roosevelt Elementary - 300 North B Street - 229



USD 470 has shown success in the classroom in multiple ways. NWEA student scores have shown continued progress. Additionally, achievement is





noted in math, reading, and writing, as USD 470 has received several Challenge Awards. The district has seen improving graduation rates and the most recent statistics project the graduation rate to move above the 90% mark.

### ***Preschool Education***

In 2017, USD 470 formally transitioned to a blended PreK model. The Ark City PreK office is housed at Adams Elementary but each elementary school provides PreK classes. All 4-year-olds in USD 470 are afforded the opportunity to enroll in the district's PreK program for free. Enrollment in these classes includes students with Special Education needs and those who qualify for Head Start services. The PreK program focuses on preparing students for kindergarten and encourages skill development and improvement based on the child's developmental level. In addition to the 4-year-old PreK program, some offerings are available to 3-year-olds with special education and/or speech development needs.

In addition to those programs offered through USD 470, other preschool and daycare programs include Arkansas City Christian Academy, FBC Early Learning and Child Care Center, and Wood Child Care Center.

### ***Private/Parochial Schools***

For those wishing to educate their children in a non-public school setting, there are three schools in Arkansas City. Arkansas City Christian Academy serves kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades at two locations. The pre-K and elementary students are located at First Southern Baptist Church at 138 E Kansas Avenue. Seventh grade through 12th grade students are served at the First Baptist Church at 220 E. Central Avenue. Two other private schools operate in Arkansas City --One Room Schoolhouse at 901 Circle Drive, and Sacred Heart Catholic School at 310 S B Street.

### ***Cowley College***

Cowley College offers multiple majors and career pathway possibilities to prepare students for transfer to a four-year program or to enter the workforce with a two-year job-ready degree. In addition, the College provides enrichment and training opportunities to our community patrons and industries.

Cowley College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and coordinated by the Kansas Board of Regents.



Cowley offers over 120 different programs of study that guides a student on a pathway towards completing a degree or certificate.

Students can complete their first two years of coursework leading toward a bachelor's degree at a university in virtually any field of study. Cowley has articulation agreements with universities, online colleges, and technical schools in Kansas, Oklahoma, and beyond. Many associate degrees and certificates will give students the credentials and skills needed to immediately enter a specialized workforce.

The Cowley College Golden Tigers program, offered to community members who are at least 50 years of age or who are fully retired, provides educational opportunities that promotes the social, intellectual, mental, spiritual, and physical well-being of its members. Short-term classes, hands-on workshops, and enlightening day trips are offered throughout the fall and spring semesters each year. The Golden Tigers program is designed to create community for its members while enriching their lives.



Begun in the basement of Arkansas City High School in 1922 as Arkansas City Junior College, Cowley College is an important element of the community as well as an educational institution. Students are recruited to the school and often remain in the community. Various cultural and art opportunities, along with sporting competitions, enrich not only the students' experience, but that of other community members. Also, as a service to the community, Cowley College provides special programming and pricing for senior citizens at the campus. For the business community, it provides specialized business training or education, making the school an important partner to a wide variety of businesses in the region. Cowley encourages students to continue their education by articulation agreements with four-year institutions. There are courses offered by Friends University in Wichita for completion of bachelor's degrees, and with Southwestern College in Winfield for online Master's courses.

## **2.7 OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS**

The **Arkansas City Area Chamber of Commerce** is a place for local businesspersons to network, participate in individual and community marketing and promotion, and participate in a variety of programs. The Chamber provides a number of opportunities to further business relationships through ribbon cuttings, coffees, after hour events, and leadership development. It is also important in facilitating communication among members.

**VISIT Ark City** works with and assists the City of Arkansas City, businesses, festivals and nonprofits with local events. VAC welcomes and plans for groups and gatherings that take place in our community such as conventions, family and class reunions and regional meetings. VAC is funded by transient guest tax.

The **Arkansas City Senior Center** is a place where seniors receive services such as meals, recreation, education, as well as social interaction. The Center provides vital services to seniors, their families, and the community. The Center is located at 320 S. A Street and meals are served on weekdays. The community is also fortunate to be home to the regional office of the **Area Agency on Aging and Disability Resource Center**, located at 304 S. Summit. The South Central ADRC provides a variety of services to those who are disabled or over 60 years of age.

The **Burford Center for the Arts**, located at 112 S. Summit, provides direction for the Burford Theater as well as other programming. The group has completed a campaign for \$4.2 million to fund many theater improvements including the lobby, HVAC systems, structural repairs, and fire suppression, restoration of the auditorium, mezzanine, balcony and promenade. These successful efforts demonstrate the value the Center has for community members and businesses. Programming offered throughout the year includes classes for adults and youth in music, art, and theatre, along with after school programs with USD 470.

**Cherokee Strip Land Rush Museum** is an organization committed to preserving the history of the 1893 Land Rush and other local history. The **Cowley County Genealogy Library** is also located at the Museum, along with a variety of other indoor exhibits including hands-on rooms for activities, and a theater with stage seating for 150. Outdoor exhibits include Baird Living Farm and barn exhibits, along with a hummingbird and butterfly garden, and vegetable garden.

Recreation is an important contributor to community character, whether it is in athletic competition or health and fitness classes. **Arkansas City Recreation Commission** is funded primarily through mill levy funds, but also receives funds from sponsors, donors and registrations. A facility and program overview of the Commission is found at Chapter 5.

### ***Historic Preservation Organizations***

The **Arkansas City Historical Society** has been in existence since 1968. Its mission is to preserve the history from the community, through the stories told by early settlers. The original members of the society were able to interview the children of the founders of the community, and also collect historical materials. Eight books on the history of the community have been published with aid from the Society.

Arkansas City has been designated as a certified local government and has a board that oversees the actions related to the buildings and historical district designated in Arkansas City. There is more on this in Chapter 5, detailing the historical features and assets of the community.

### ***Civic & Other Groups***

Civic groups also provide social opportunities for community members, with their activities, often local, but also extending to the region and around the world to aid humanitarian causes. Arkansas City is home to several civic clubs, including: Lions Clubs, Elks, Kiwanis, Optimist, Rotary and Soroptimist. Related to military service, there are the VFW and American Legion. Arkansas City also has other groups that seek to improve their members' lives through activities or targeted learning, such as Toastmasters, Humane Society, Relay 4 Life and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Legacy Foundation is a non-profit foundation that assists other non-profits with fundraising. RISE Cowley is a coalition of people seeking to improve public health in Cowley County.

Angels in the Attic and Cowley House of Hope exist to serve the needs of Cowley County's low income and homeless or under-housed residents.

## **2.8 RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS**

Faith organizations influence and help define communities. Arkansas City has a wide variety of faith organizations that are working to improve the lives of those in and around the community. They provide support and direction for their members and outreach in many ways to those less fortunate in the community. Some examples are: Manna Ministries, various meal ministries and Habitat for Humanity.

There are over 40 houses of worship, representing most major denominations and faiths, and reflecting the importance of the faith community to community members. The social and charitable opportunities also add dimension to people's lives in countless ways. Our ability to care for one another reminds us that we live in a place where we are cared for.

A visual demonstration of the importance of faith for the community is Scripture Hill. The message "Christ Died for the Ungodly" is north of Arkansas City and west of the BNSF railroad tracks. The whitewashed letters are 18 feet high and 12 feet wide. For over 150 years, faith in One who is greater than us has guided and inspired the greatness of our community. That same faith will lead us farther still.