



ALL ABOUT ARLINGTON: The American Dream City

BY BRANDI SMITH

Photo Credit: Courtesy: City of Arlington

It's the idea to which most all of us subscribe, especially in the real estate industry: work hard and you will find success. It won't always be easy; sometimes, it will be incredibly difficult, but it's the American Dream. By definition, it's "the ideal that every U.S. citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative."

Settled in the 1840s, Arlington is now the seventh-largest city in Texas and its population of nearly 400,000 makes it the third-largest city in the Metroplex. That position, though, didn't come easily. It was the result of hard work, determination and initiative, which is why Arlington is "The American Dream City."

"An extremely far-fetched idea"

Nestled between Dallas and Fort Worth, Arlington's location has been key to its incredible success.

"Probably half of the people traveling between those cities are passing through Arlington,"

said Brett Derbes, a Metroplex native and managing editor of the Handbook of Texas. "[Arlington] gets a lot of that transit business."

The city went from farming community to manufacturing hub in 1951 when General Motors opened an assembly plant in Arlington.

"At the time, it was an extremely far-fetched idea," said Bruce Payne, director of the city's Office of Economic Development. "The then-mayor was persistent and helped GM see the opportunities of establishing itself in Texas."

As a result of the city's can-do spirit, the plant has provided thousands of jobs for residents of Arlington and the rest of the Dallas area for more than 60 years.

"It's gone through several updates over the years, but GM is currently in the middle of the largest expansion it's ever done," Payne said.

Arlington is also home to a number of the

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Metroplex's largest employers, including Texas Health Resources, Arlington ISD and the University of Texas at Arlington.

"It's fueling reinvention"

Just more than a decade after GM opened its doors, the educational institution known as Arlington State College was welcomed into the University of Texas System. A name change two years later created the University of Texas at Arlington.

"I think our biggest asset is having UTA adjacent to our downtown," said Payne. "It's fueling reinvention in our downtown development."

Arlington's symbiotic relationship with UTA extends far beyond aesthetics. The university aids the city in luring new companies to the area by churning out a skilled workforce.

"UTA has a phenomenal engineering program as well as many other STEM programs that our economy needs and demands," Payne said. "It is an asset a lot of cities do not have."

UTA's growth in recent years seems to have mirrored that of its home, exploding in population and even threatening to overtake University of Texas at Austin as the largest university in the state.

“The university is undergoing a stunning amount of growth right now,” said Payne. “It’ll keep us young and fresh.”

Enrollment soared by 6.1 percent between Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 for a total of more than 37,000 students. However, when factoring in online attendance, that number shoots up to more than 55,000.

“UTA’s location in North Texas makes it a great option for students who’d like to stay somewhat close to home and still get a great education,” Derbes said, who attended classes at UTA.

“A tall hill to climb”

Though UTA and GM prove that Arlington can study hard and work harder, the city also knows how to let off steam. It’s long been viewed as the region’s entertainment hub, harkening back to the creation of the Arlington Downs Racetrack. Built in 1929, years before Texas lawmakers legalized gambling, the racetrack drew thousands of visitors to the then-fledgling community.

Arlington has raised the stakes over the years, going all out on entertainment as a job creator and tourism generator. In 1972, then-mayor Tom Vandergriff persuaded the owner of the Washington Senators to relocate his team to Arlington. So began the Texas Rangers’ legacy.

“[Vandergriff] did it against the wishes of none other than President Richard Nixon,” said Payne. “It was a tall hill to climb to get them to come here, but they’ve been in Arlington ever since.”

One professional sports team wasn’t enough for the city, which successfully lured the Dallas Cowboys into Arlington by way of the magnificent, state-of-the-art, \$1.2 billion AT&T Stadium in 2009.

“I think this is the best venue on the planet,” Payne said. “I watch Cowboys and Rangers games on television and think, there’s no way the city could ever buy this kind of exposure.”

“AT&T Stadium really is an incredible mark on the landscape for all of DFW,” said Derbes. “If you go to the high points of the cities surrounding Arlington, you can see that stadium.”

Both the Rangers’ Globe Life Park and Cowboys’ AT&T Stadium offer more opportunities than just their home teams’ sports; they are host to myriad other sporting events, concerts and gatherings. Combined with the draw of Six Flags over Texas, Arlington’s entertainment industry brings in more than 6.5 million visitors each year.

“It really has been incredible to watch Arlington grow from the city it was when I was a young boy to what it is now,” said Derbes. “It’s almost unrecognizable.”

“A redevelopment city”

Hoping to capitalize on that tourism traffic, The Cordish Companies recently announced plans for a \$200 million dollar mixed-use development next to Globe Life Park. The project, called Texas Live!, is a joint venture shared by Cordish and the Rangers and will feature a 100,000 square foot entertainment complex, a 35,000 square foot convention center annex and a 300-room hotel.

“We wanted to see an entertainment group come in and actually partner with one of the sports franchises,” Payne said. “When Texas Live! Opens, it will create activities outside of ticketed events.”

Arlington is also welcoming other projects and developers as the city evolves from its historic roots amid record growth in North Texas.

“We’ve transitioned into a redevelopment city,” said Payne. “We continue to see a lot of residential interest. As housing types and consumer tastes change, we are seeing a response from development community to try to meet that need.”

The 2,083-acre Viridian development is a classic example of Arlington adapting to meet the needs of developers for mutual benefit. The project, which sits along the Trinity River, includes roughly 1,000 home lots, 700 of which have already sold. Plans also include a 10,000 square foot event center, as well as swimming pools, an event lawn, tennis courts and a basketball court.

“There was a lot we had to do in terms of creating a financial condition that would allow for [Viridian],” Payne said. “The city is very involved in making these big things happen. Our local leaders do everything they can to get to the point of success.”

Arlington’s ‘pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps’ mentality led to unique successes long before the North Texas building boom of recent years, cementing its status as “The American Dream City.”

“We’ve achieved big things that you might not expect from a city this size,” said Payne. “We have a lot of the same tools as other cities, but we have our own unique circumstances because of Arlington’s character and location.” ●

