

# JOPLIN REGION, MISSOURI

## Joplin Region Economic Development Strategy



### **Background**

The Joplin Region had endured significant challenges when *Market Street Services* first partnered with them in 2011. The region was hard hit by the Great Recession facing declining populations in some communities, low average wages, high overall and child poverty rates, a relatively larger share of adults with no high school diploma, and the loss of a number of major employers. As the region began to emerge from the Great Recession, it was hit by an EF-5 tornado.

*Market Street* first partnered with Joplin Region leadership to establish the building blocks for post-tornado business recovery through *Market Street's* pro bono assistance to the Joplin Business Recovery and Expansion Initiative. In 2012, the Joplin Regional Prosperity Initiative (JRPI) engaged *Market Street* for a full-fledged Regional Economic Development Strategy to ensure that as the region continued to rebuild over the coming years that economic development actions moving forward were regional in scope pursuing efforts in the multi-state Joplin Region. As part of that process, the JRPI identified visionary, aggressive, new initiatives to provide the framework necessary to increase the economic competitiveness and livability of the region.

The **Joplin Region Economic Development Strategy** strives to integrate and forward a set of transformative efforts that can provide the most bang for the buck for regional investors and implementers. The recommendations the strategy puts forward are achievable, actionable, and consensus-based; they emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted throughout the strategic process.

The strategy is framed around four goals with objectives and action steps organized by key priorities in these goal areas:

- The region will be a place to learn and advance
- The region will be a place to work and prosper
- The region will be a place to live and thrive
- The region will be a place to recognize and celebrate

### *Implementation Highlights*

Implementation began in mid-2013. During the first year of implementation the Joplin region has been busy accomplishing their goals.

- When the strategy was launched over 120 people from the region volunteered to serve on implementation work groups. The groups have been meeting on a monthly basis and work closely with the JRPI to make sure that deadlines, goals, and strategies are met.
- Established the Joplin Regional Biz Center in 2014 to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses throughout the region. The Joplin Regional Biz Center website provides visitors with information about business assistance groups in the region, provides data reports with information on economic realities, competitors, customers and prospective customers tailored to specific businesses' needs, provides a list of financial resources for new and existing small businesses (from federal to local), provides links to local innovation and research centers, and a wealth of other information for local entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- Established and branded the FOUR4NINE Technology Corridor, an innovation corridor between Kansas Technology Center, Missouri Center for Advanced Power Systems, and the Missouri Alternative and Renewable Energy Technology Center. A website is currently in the works.
- Created and launched a website for the Joplin Regional Angel Investors Network, a conduit to connect entrepreneurs with angel investors. The website also provides a list of preferred attorneys broken down by state.
- In late 2013, the housing work group organized a Community Land Trust Housing Summit with speakers from nearby communities who have successful land trusts. In early 2014, leaders from the three-state region met to discuss the formation of a Land Trust in the region. They listened to a presentation by the Lawrence, Kansas Community Housing Trust about their success in producing and sustaining affordable housing opportunities for potential homeowners and renters. Additional meetings are planned for late 2014.
- Building on Jasper County, Missouri's designation as the first national Certified Work Ready Community through ACT, Cherokee and Labette counties in Kansas were accepted into the ACT Bright Spots Pilot Certified Community Work Ready Academy. The ACT Work Ready Communities work group has been developing training materials for local schools and teachers to engage them in helping to create Work Ready Communities. The group has also reached out to all regional school districts' superintendents and made many presentations about Work Ready Communities throughout the region.

