

From: Emma L. Cottingham <ECottingham@jonesboro.org>
Subject: Fw: 2025 Arkansas Delta Awards Submission – Tourism Person of the Year (Danny Kapales)
To: Danny Kapales <DKapales@jonesboro.org>; Brian Richardson <BRichardson@jonesboro.org>; Donna Malone <DMalone@jonesboro.org>; Lynette Hirsch <LHirsch@jonesboro.org>
Sent: October 31, 2025 5:58 PM (UTC-04:00)
Attached: ArkansasDeltaAwardsNominationForm_2025Submission-TourismPersonofTheYear.docx, Danny Kapales - ADBW - 2025 Tourism Person of the Year.pdf

It's all sent over. Fingers Crossed!



Emma Cottingham
— MEDIA SPECIALIST —

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Book time with Emma L. Cottingham

From: Emma L. Cottingham <ECottingham@jonesboro.org>
Sent: Friday, October 31, 2025 4:50 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: 2025 Arkansas Delta Awards Submission – Tourism Person of the Year (Danny Kapales)

Hello Ruth,

Please find attached the completed nomination form and full submission for the 2025 Arkansas Delta Byways Awards.

This nomination recognizes Danny Kapales, Director of Parks & Recreation for the City of Jonesboro, for his outstanding leadership and lasting contributions to tourism, recreation, and community development throughout the Delta region.

Attachments:

1. Completed Nomination Form – Tourism Person of the Year
2. Full Submission with Supporting Details (PDF)

I wasn't sure what format you prefer for submissions, so if you need these files in another format, I'm happy to provide them right away. Please don't hesitate to let me know if there's anything else you need or any additional details I can provide to support the review.

Thank you so much for your time, your attention to detail, and all the hard work you put into coordinating these awards each year — it truly means a lot to all of us in the community.

Best regards,
Emma Cottingham
Digital Media Specialist

City of Jonesboro, Arkansas

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Emma Cottingham
— MEDIA SPECIALIST —

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Book time with Emma L. Cottingham

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City of Jonesboro AR

24th



Annual

Arkansas Delta Awards

Nomination Form

Deadline for Submission is October 31, 2025

1. **Hospitality Award** – Given to a restaurant, lodging facility or other business, community or organization that has demonstrated true hospitality in the Delta region.
2. **Entrepreneur Award** – Given to an individual or small business that has made a significant contribution to expanding tourism opportunities in the Arkansas Delta Region.
3. **Tourism Support/Promotional Award** – Given to a business, organization or group that has contributed significantly to the promotion of tourism in the Arkansas Delta Byways region.
4. **Festival/Event of the Year Award** – Given to a festival or event that celebrates the uniqueness of the Delta, their community or local history and promotes tourism in the Arkansas Delta Byways.
5. **Boot Strap Award** – Given to an individual, organization or community that has achieved significant success “on a shoestring” having limited means to work with, either in resources or finances.
6. **Cultural Heritage Award** – Given to an organization, community or business that best interprets and promotes the cultural heritage of the Arkansas Delta Byways region.
7. **Tourism Person of the Year Award** – Given to an individual who has contributed significantly to the enhancement of tourism in the Arkansas Delta Byways region.

Please submit all information on the attached sheet to the Arkansas Delta Byways Tourism Association awards committee. Please copy as many sheets as needed for your nominations. Attach additional pages justifying why your organization, community, individual, etc., should win the award. Please include photographs, newspaper articles and other items that support your nomination. ALL PHOTOGRAPHS,

**NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND OTHER PROMOTIONAL ITEMS
BECOME PROPERTY OF ARKANSAS DELTA BYWAYS.**



DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS OCTOBER 31, 2025

Nomination Form

Category: Tourism Person of the Year Award

Nominee: Danny Kapales, Director of Parks & Recreation, City of Jonesboro, AR

Address 300. S. Church Street, Jonesboro, Arkansas 72401

County: Craighead County

Nominee Phone Number 870-933-4604

Email: dkapales@jonesboro.org

Reason this nomination should win: Please see attached pages

Nominated by: Emma Cottingham Email: ECottingham@Jonesboro.org



Nomination for Tourism Person of the Year

Nominee: Danny Kapales
Title: Director of Parks & Recreation
City of Jonesboro, Arkansas
Phone: 870-933-4604
Email: dkapales@jonesboro.org
County: Craighead County
Nominated By: Emma Cottingham
Email: ECottingham@Jonesboro.org

For more than two decades, Danny Kapales has shaped Jonesboro's Parks & Recreation Department into a cornerstone of community life and regional tourism. Beginning part-time in 2002 and promoted to Director in 2018, he now directly oversees more than 1,200 acres of land — 26 parks, 5 community centers, and 4 cemeteries, and all the associated programming of park events — welcoming residents and visitors from across the Arkansas Delta Byways. Under his leadership, Jonesboro's parks have become economic drivers and tourism pillars, supporting tournaments, inclusive programs, and destination events that attract thousands each year.

Under his leadership, Jonesboro's parks have become both economic engines and tourism pillars, supporting tournaments, inclusive programs, and destination events that attract thousands each year. Danny's commitment to collaboration extends to partners such as Arkansas State University, the Jonesboro Chamber of Commerce, City Water & Light, the Advertising & Promotion Commission, United Way of Northeast Arkansas and Arkansas Delta Byways, strengthening the link between recreation, tourism, and economic vitality throughout Northeast Arkansas.

In addition to physical development, Danny's leadership has earned statewide recognition for excellence in planning and programming. In 2024 alone, the department achieved multiple honors:

- 2024 Trail of the Year (Natural Surface) – Arkansas Recreation & Parks Association, for Craighead Forest Park
- 2024 Tourism Program of the Year – Arkansas Recreation & Parks Association, for the African American Cultural Center at E. Boone Watson Community Center
- 2024 Planning Award: Plan of the Year (Population 30,000+) – Arkansas Chapter of the American Planning Association, for the Health Accelerator within the Jonesboro Parks Master Plan
- 2024 Sports Management Program of the Year – Arkansas Recreation & Parks Association, for the Jonesboro Shooting Sports Complex
- 2024 Trendsetter City of the Year – Diversity & Inclusion Award – Arkansas Municipal League, recognizing Project SEARCH, Project CARE, the Social Determinants of Health Study, and the Communications Board at Miracle League Park



These honors underscore Danny's success in aligning recreation, tourism, and cultural storytelling into a unified vision for the Delta Byways region.

Under Danny's leadership, Jonesboro Parks & Recreation plays an essential role in more than 20 downtown and citywide events each year, from large-scale festivals and athletic showcases to cultural celebrations and holiday parades. The department's involvement extends far beyond setup and cleanup. His team provides logistical support, stage and electrical coordination, waste management, safety barricades, beautification, and ground restoration for every major event that brings residents and visitors together in the heart of Jonesboro.

Each festival is unique — some celebrate art and culture, others highlight local food, music, or heritage — but all share a common thread: they rely on Parks & Recreation's hands-on expertise to transform public spaces into vibrant, welcoming venues. In 2024, those events generated measurable returns for Jonesboro's tourism economy. According to Advertising & Promotion tax reports, prepared food and hospitality revenues climbed steadily throughout the year, reflecting strong visitor spending tied to festivals, tournaments, and cultural gatherings. Major draws like the Great American Eclipse, Downtown BBQ & Music Fest, Local Fest, Pride, and the Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism filled hotels, restaurants, and storefronts citywide—contributing to more than \$5 million in total tourism-related revenue. During the conference, statewide tourism professionals experienced firsthand the diversity of Jonesboro's recreation scene, from bike rides through Craighead Forest Park to target practice at the Jonesboro Shooting Sports Complex—both shining examples of how the city blends outdoor adventure with hospitality. This growth underscored what Danny Kapales, and his team have long demonstrated: that community events aren't just celebrations; they're economic engines that sustain local businesses, showcase Jonesboro's hospitality, and strengthen its standing as the premier tourism hub of the Arkansas Delta.

Jonesboro has long been recognized as the hub of Northeast Arkansas — a city where recreation, community, and tourism converge. Under Danny Kapales's leadership, the Parks & Recreation Department has turned Jonesboro's public spaces into regional destinations that draw visitors from across the state and beyond. From tournaments and trail races to family gatherings and weekend getaways, Jonesboro's parks have become the heartbeat of regional tourism.

In 2025, Danny expanded Jonesboro's tourism infrastructure with the launch of the Park Ranger Program — the first full-time initiative of its kind, in Arkansas. Developed in alignment with the City's Master Parks Plan and operating under the Code Enforcement Division, the program positions Rangers as both safety ambassadors and community stewards across every park and downtown event. Their presence ensures that every visitor — from families at Craighead Forest Park to festivalgoers on Main Street — experiences Jonesboro as both welcoming and secure.

Rangers receive comprehensive training in public safety, emergency response, and local park education, enabling them to assist visitors, support event logistics, and protect city assets. The program strengthens Jonesboro's Destination 100K vision, demonstrating that safety and hospitality are inseparable pillars of sustainable tourism. With the Park Ranger Program, Jonesboro has set a



new statewide benchmark for how recreation, culture, and public trust come together to create a city visitors remember for all the right reasons.

At the center of this impact is Joe Mack Campbell Park, a nationally recognized complex that hosts both baseball and soccer tournaments throughout the year. The Jonesboro Baseball Boosters alone bring in more than 200 teams each season, filling hotels and restaurants citywide. The park is also home to travel soccer programs that bring in college, high school, and junior high teams from across the region for practices, scrimmages, and tournaments. It also supports football (flag and tackle), rugby, and track events — welcoming athletes of all ages from across the state. Recently, the park welcomed 700+ athletes from 27 schools during the 5A East and 4A-3 Conference cross-country meets, further cementing its reputation as one of Arkansas's premier sports tourism facilities.

Nearby, the Southside Softball Complex hosts roughly 20 tournaments annually, drawing 30 to 75 teams per event and boosting the economy with every weekend of play. Beyond tournaments, Southside serves as the home base for 32 junior high softball teams that utilize the complex at least three days a week. Sanctioned through USA Softball, these events showcase Jonesboro's high-quality facilities and hospitality — keeping athletes and spectators returning year after year.

Recreation in Jonesboro extends far beyond athletic competition. Craighead Forest Park, which is home to the 2024 Arkansas Trail of the Year, is a year-round attraction for nature lovers and adventure seekers alike. Its expanded trail system, upgraded playgrounds, and newly installed energy-efficient lighting have made it one of the most visited outdoor destinations in the Delta Byways region. The park also serves as host to the NICA Mountain Biking Series, bringing in more than 300 student-athletes and their families from across the state for race weekends that fill local hotels and restaurants.

Equally impactful is Miracle League Park, a statewide model for inclusive recreation and one of Jonesboro's proudest achievements. Its design and programming — including initiatives like Project SEARCH and Project CARE — have made it a destination for families from throughout Arkansas who seek accessible play and community connection. These efforts helped earn Jonesboro the 2024 Trendsetter City Diversity & Inclusion Award, highlighting the city's leadership in accessible tourism and recreation.

Meanwhile, the Jonesboro Shooting Sports Complex continues to expand its influence as one of the largest outdoor recreation destinations in the region. Since opening in 2021, the complex has welcomed more than 20,000 visitors, thrown over 865,000 clay pigeons, and attracted nearly 3,000 memberships. Youth tournaments and regional shoots bring hundreds of competitors and spectators to the city each year, further diversifying Jonesboro's tourism portfolio.

In 2024, Jonesboro introduced another tourism amenity with the opening of The Bark Park — a 30,000-square-foot facility featuring separate play areas for large and small dogs, shaded seating, and agility features designed for year-round use. With 68% of U.S. households owning pets and nearly one-third of travelers now bringing their dogs along on trips, this new addition strengthens Jonesboro's reputation as a pet-friendly destination for families, RV travelers, and tournament guests.



Looking toward the future, Danny Kapales spearheaded the Jonesboro Parks & Recreation Master Plan, which engaged more than 1,200 residents through surveys and focus groups to envision the city's next decade of recreational growth. That vision secured the largest parks grant in Jonesboro's history — a \$1 million Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program award, matched by \$1.1 million in city funds and \$100,000 from the Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro — to create the new Northeast Jonesboro Community Park.

Breaking ground in 2026, this 13-acre park will feature a universal adventure playground, walking and biking trails, tennis and pickleball courts, a dog park, and multiuse fields surrounded by ample greenspace. More than just another park, EPIC Park will be a tourism gateway for an underserved area of the city — designed for accessibility, family fun, and community celebration.

From family reunions and weddings to field trips and tournaments, people from across Northeast Arkansas travel to Jonesboro's parks to create memories. Whether they're camping at Craighead Forest, competing at Joe Mack Campbell, celebrating at Miracle League, or walking their dogs at Bark Park, visitors experience the very spirit of Jonesboro — a city that's Always Moving, and the undeniable recreational hub of the Delta Byways region.

Allen Park has become one of Jonesboro's most inclusive and family-friendly recreation destinations following its 2025 renovation. The park's all-new ADA-accessible playground and modern splash pad ensure that everyone — residents and visitors alike — can enjoy outdoor play without barriers. With nearly one-fourth of nearby residents living with a disability, Allen Park reflects Jonesboro's commitment to accessibility and wellness while serving as a tourism asset that welcomes families of all ages and abilities. Parker Park followed suit in 2024 with the unveiling of its new zero-entry community pool and ADA-accessible playground — transforming the park into one of the city's top summer attractions. The improvements make Parker Park a true destination for family fun, local events, and travelers seeking safe, inclusive recreation.

Located on Nettleton Avenue, the Jonesboro Youth Center and adjacent Jonesboro Pool Center form one of the city's most versatile indoor-outdoor recreation hubs. The Youth Center's upgrades include an indoor turf field, a full-sized basketball and volleyball court, and a community room available for events or rentals — making it ideal for tournaments, training, or family gatherings. Next door, the Pool Center offers a competition-level swimming facility capable of hosting youth meets and aquatic events that draw participants from around the region. Together, these two facilities provide year-round recreation for residents and visitors, solidifying Jonesboro's reputation as the regional hub for youth sports and active tourism in Northeast Arkansas.

As one of Jonesboro's most iconic landmarks, the Earl Bell Community Center combines historic charm with modern recreation — a rare blend that sets it apart as both a community treasure and a tourism attraction. Originally constructed in 1936 through the Works Progress Administration, the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and serves as a living connection to Jonesboro's cultural heritage. Named after Olympic pole vaulter Earl Bell, a Jonesboro native, the center features a full-sized gymnasium, tennis courts, dance rooms, meeting spaces, and even a rock-climbing wall — making it a destination for both history enthusiasts and recreation seekers. Its



distinctive Art Deco architecture, Olympic namesake, and active programming make the Earl Bell Center a true embodiment of Jonesboro's tourism identity — where heritage meets activity, and history stays alive through community use.

Visitor feedback consistently praises the Parks & Recreation Department for its attention to detail, exceptional cleanliness, and friendly staff — all hallmarks of the Southern hospitality that define Jonesboro's identity within the Arkansas Delta Byways. These qualities turn a simple park visit into a memorable experience, encouraging travelers to return and share their positive impressions.

Under Danny Kapales's leadership, Jonesboro's Park system has become a catalyst for regional tourism and economic vitality. Through investment in inclusive recreation, beautification, and trail connectivity, the city's parks now serve as both community gathering spaces and visitor destinations, strengthening Jonesboro's reputation as a place people don't just live — but love to visit.

Yet Danny also understands that tourism in the Delta is about more than recreation — it's about heritage and storytelling. The Parks & Recreation Department plays a vital role in preserving that legacy through its stewardship of the E. Boone Watson African American Cultural Center, a site that celebrates the history, culture, and contributions of Craighead County's African American community.

In 2024, Danny and his team collaborated with the Jonesboro Police Department and city leaders to dedicate a new museum exhibit honoring African American officers who have served the city with distinction. The framed composite, accepted by Danny and Building Coordinator Roger McKinney, now hangs proudly within the Cultural Center as a tribute to representation, diversity, and community leadership. This partnership underscores Danny's belief that cultural tourism is essential to Jonesboro's story — that visitors should not only see the city's parks but also feel its history and humanity. By intertwining recreation with storytelling, Jonesboro invites travelers to experience the soul of the Delta — where every park, trail, and cultural site tells part of the region's shared journey.

Danny Kapales' legacy in Jonesboro Parks & Recreation can be seen — and felt — in every corner of the city. Having learned under the guidance of former directors Jason Wilkie and the late Jeff Owens, he carries forward their vision of elevating Jonesboro's parks while shaping his own path rooted in inclusion, accessibility, and meaning.

That belief — that every space should have purpose and heart — has guided his leadership from restoring historic green spaces to creating fully inclusive playgrounds that welcome every generation. The Miracle League Park, Rotary Centennial Park, and future projects on the northeast side all reflect that principle: they are not just playgrounds, but reflections of a community that values connection, dignity, and belonging. Jonesboro's parks have evolved into true gathering places that serve both residents and visitors — places where grandparents in wheelchairs can play alongside grandchildren, and where families from neighboring towns come not only to enjoy the parks, but to dine, shop, and experience Jonesboro's local culture. His work bridges quality of life and economic development, transforming recreation into a catalyst for tourism and community pride.



Danny's legacy is defined not by ownership, but by inclusion. Through his leadership, Jonesboro's parks have become more than green spaces — they are living landmarks of the Arkansas Delta, inviting people from across the nation to connect, to belong, and to leave their mark. Every visitor, from the smallest child to the most seasoned traveler, can see a piece of themselves reflected in the city's story — a story that continues to grow, just like the parks he has helped shape for generations to come.

