

THE STATE'S BUSINESS NEWS AUTHORITY.

Arkansas Business

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Port Growth Stymied

Expiration of dedicated sales tax clouds future of LR Port Industrial Park. [P6]

Happy Trails

The \$6 million project to buy and conserve Blue Mountain is well underway. [P8]

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SPOTLIGHT: Tourism



Executive Q&A With Shea Lewis

The new Arkansas State Parks director says he expects the trend of record visitation to continue this year. [P22]

The List [P11-12]
Largest Hotels, A&P Tax Collections
Whispers [P3]
'Hospitality' helps land \$80M EV project



Kraig Pomrenke, GM of the Embassy Suites by Hilton Jonesboro Red Wolf Convention Center.

[PHOTO BY TERRANCE ARMSTARD]

Checking Back In

Hotels doing better as group business picks up

By Mark Friedman
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The general manager for Jonesboro's newest hotel and convention center predicts this year it will see close to the level of business expected in 2020, before the pandemic hit, as business groups return.

"We're finally seeing the group business come back," said Kraig Pomrenke, the general manager of the Embassy Suites by Hilton Jonesboro Red Wolf Convention Center. "That particular market segment is what really dried up for all of us. Anybody that had a convention center-type hotel or big space hotel, that one really hurt."

The Embassy Suites was struck particularly hard as its \$58 million, 203-

room hotel opened on Dec. 30, 2019 — about 70 days before the pandemic arrived in Arkansas. An attached convention center offers 40,000 SF of meeting and event space.

The property had "a lot of business on the books" in its inaugural year, but all of those events were postponed, Pomrenke said.

Most of the events, though, have been rebooked for 2022. "This year, so far, is looking to be a pretty good year for us because of those delayed bookings" that have been rescheduled, he said. But bookings still have not completely rebounded. Some groups, such as those in the medical industry, are still hesitant to schedule events, he said. While

HOTELS CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

ARKANSAS BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARDS

34TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION

FINALISTS

CATEGORY I - 1-30 EMPLOYEES

ECCI
 Harbor Environmental & Safety
 Mathias Properties Inc.
 Riverwood Homes
 Tanners Team Sports Inc.

CATEGORY II - 31-55 EMPLOYEES

CAT Squared
 Few
 McCauley Services
 MidSouth Orthopedics

CATEGORY III - 56-150 EMPLOYEES

Edafio Technology Partners
 Inuvo Inc.
 Stratrice LLC

CATEGORY IV - 151-499 EMPLOYEES

First Orion
 Ritter Communications
 Staley Technologies

CATEGORY V - 500+ EMPLOYEES

Big River Steel
 Hytrol Conveyor Co. Inc.
 Rock Dental Brands

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR

Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries
 Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund
 Thea Foundation
 20th Century Club of Little Rock Inc.
 Union Rescue Mission

NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

Jama Best, Arkansas Humanities Council
 Elizabeth Clogston, 20th Century Club of Little Rock Inc.
 Ruthanne Hill, Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund
 Adam Head, CARTI
 Diane LaFollette, Mid-America Science Museum
 Janell Mason, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Arkansas

BUSINESS EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

Dan Andrews, Tempus Realty Partners
 Jordan Franklin, Stratrice
 Richard Howe, Inuvo Inc.
 Judy R. McReynolds, ArcBest Corp.
 Gina Radke, Galley Support Innovations Inc.

WOMEN'S FOUNDATION GENDER EQUITY FINALISTS

Chenal Family Therapy
 Clinton National Airport
 Southwest Power Pool