

# KEEPING A STRONG ECONOMY GROWING

## COUNTY FOCUSES on WORKFORCE QUALITY by BUILDING a WORK READY COMMUNITY

For Mississippi County, Arkansas, becoming an ACT® Work Ready Community (WRC) was about making a good situation even better.

Mississippi County's economy is powered largely by manufacturing and health care, and business is good. Highly skilled workers abound, and the steel industry in particular has created a large employer base. The average income for workers with a two-year degree is around \$44,000—the highest in any Arkansas county.

But the region's economy has faced big challenges, including impacts on local manufacturers and competition from overseas steel companies. Challenges bring opportunities, and county leaders wanted to prepare its workforce for the long term by:

- Helping citizens gain and build on valuable work skills
- Providing a standardized measure of employee readiness for industries and educators

Using economic development funding from the Delta Regional Authority and the East Arkansas Planning and Development District, Mississippi County leaders launched an initiative to become an ACT Work Ready Community, along with four surrounding counties.

“Our employment rates were already on an upswing, but there was a need to enhance the skills of our existing workforce, validate the skills of our emerging workforce, and create regional value for credential attainments,” said Sherri Bennett, Vice President for College Readiness at Arkansas Northeastern College (ANC), who helped implement the initiative.



