

# Pulse of Conway

THE PREMIER SOURCE FOR BUSINESS NEWS IN THE NORTH METRO REGION



## Exec Q&A: Bart Castleberry

The mayor of the City of Conway talks quality-of-place projects, such as Connect Conway, and how they are essential to the city's long-term growth and development.

PAGE 8

FEBRUARY 2025

PulseOfConway.com



## Quality-of-Place Projects Enhance Connectivity and Community

Conway's ongoing investment in quality-of-place projects reflects its commitment to enhancing connectivity, accessibility, and overall quality of life for residents.

PAGE 6

## MORE INSIDE

### CONWAY'S NEW ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

Conway has established an entertainment district within downtown that aims to stimulate economic activity and enhance the city's appeal as a destination for visitors.

PAGE 5

### REAL ESTATE

The Most Expensive Homes Sold in Faulkner County in January

PAGE 10



Dr. Austin Cole specializes in a wide range of orthopedic conditions, including hip arthroscopy, muscle tears, sports hernias, bone fractures, knee and shoulder replacements, and rotator cuff injuries. He is highly experienced in treating athletes with ACL injuries and tears, providing comprehensive continuity of care from the initial injury through surgery, rehabilitation, and full recovery.

# Hometown Healing

## Dr. Austin Cole Brings Expert Sports Medicine to Conway

Conway Regional believes in blending access and excellence, familiarity, and fierce commitment. It's about creating patient experiences that are highly intentional and refreshingly personal. That's exactly what Austin Cole, MD, brings to his hometown as an orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist at Conway Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Center.

For Dr. Cole, returning home is both personal and part of a family legacy in medicine. Growing up in this close-knit community, he was drawn to sports and a commitment to serving others, understanding the vital role athletics play and the importance of accessible, high-quality care for athletes at every level. Now, he provides not just treatment but a com-

prehensive approach to care, curated for each individual athlete, from prevention to recovery and beyond.

Dr. Cole focuses on prevention, education, and a team-centered approach that keeps the entire community engaged in the well-being of its athletes. He works closely with athletic trainers and physical therapists during local games to ensure

HOMETOWN HEALING  
CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Crafton Tull

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# TABLE OF Contents

- 04** Cover Story  
**Hometown Healing: Dr. Austin Cole Brings Expert Sports Medicine to Conway**
- 
- 05** Focus  
**Quality of Place**
- 
- 08** Executive Q&A  
**Bart Castleberry, Mayor, City of Conway**
- 
- 10** Real Estate  
**Home Sales Rise in Conway as Faulkner County's Most Expensive Listing Fetches \$718K**
- 
- 11** Economy at a Glance  
**Key Economic Indicators for Conway**
- 

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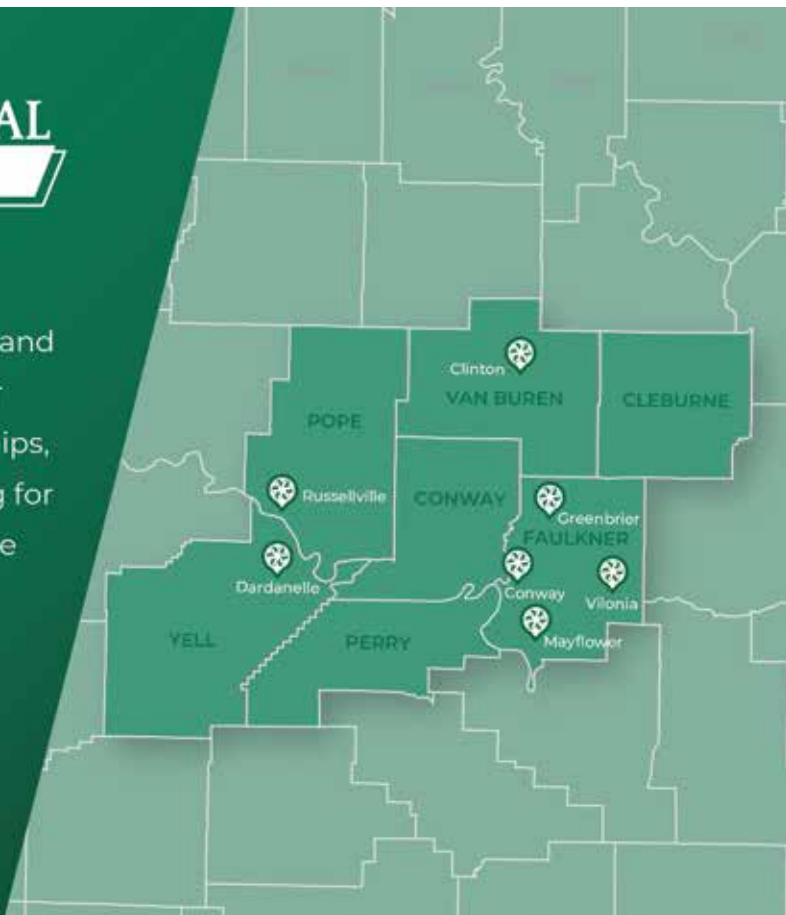




At Conway Regional, our primary care providers and local clinics blend access and excellence tailored for each patient. Our focus is on familiarity, trusted relationships, and a fierce commitment to advocating for our patients, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health.

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## HOMETOWN HEALING

FROM PAGE 1

that players receive the highest quality of care before, during, and after an injury. His philosophy extends beyond individual recovery, emphasizing injury prevention and long-term health—empowering athletes to make informed choices about their care and their future.

His specialized training in orthopedic residency, followed by a fellowship in sports medicine and foot and ankle surgery, fueled his drive for bold innovation in treating athletes. During his training, he worked with elite athletes, including the Kansas City Chiefs, Kansas City Royals, and Clemson Tigers.

“Sports bring people together,” Dr. Cole says. “In a town like Conway, athletics are more than just competition. They are part of the community’s identity. My goal is to provide care that keeps our athletes strong, safe, and performing at their best, whether in high school, college, or active later in life.”



**"Sports bring people together. In a town like Conway, athletics are more than just competition. They are part of the community identity. My goal is to provide care that keeps our athletes strong, safe, and performing at their best, whether in high school, college, or active later in life."**

### DR. AUSTIN COLE

Orthopedic Surgeon & Sports Medicine Specialist  
Conway Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Center

Dr. Cole specializes in a wide range of orthopedic conditions, including hip arthroscopy, muscle tears, sports hernias, bone fractures, knee and shoulder replacements, and rotator cuff injuries. He is highly experienced in treating athletes with ACL injuries and tears, providing comprehensive continuity of care from the initial injury through surgery, rehabilitation, and full recovery.

By collaborating with coaches, athletic trainers, and physical therapists, Dr. Cole helps create seamless recovery plans that enable patients to return to their sports or activities as safely and quickly as possible. Conway is a place built on connections, where neighbors support one another, and athletes of all ages benefit from a network of providers who prioritize health and well-being.

Now at Conway Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Center, Dr. Cole provides intentional, highly personal care that is deeply rooted in community values. Whether he is treating an injured high school athlete, helping a weekend warrior get back on the bike, or working with an active adult to regain mobility, his goal remains to ensure that every patient receives the best individualized care right here at home — it's not mass-produced healthcare, it's curated care. 📍



For Dr. Cole, returning home is both personal and part of a family legacy in medicine. Growing up in this close-knit community, he was drawn to sports and a commitment to serving others, understanding the vital role athletics play and the importance of accessible, high-quality care for athletes at every level. Now, he provides not just treatment but a comprehensive approach to c





Conway's downtown entertainment district allows businesses to sell alcoholic beverages for consumption within the district during specific events. This provides an additional revenue stream for the city and encourages businesses to actively participate in the entertainment district.

# Conway's New Entertainment District Poised to Boost Tourism, Hospitality, Visitors

Conway has established an entertainment district within downtown that aims to stimulate economic activity and enhance the city's appeal as a destination for visitors.

By designating a specific zone where the public consumption of alcoholic beverages is permissible, the city seeks to foster a more vibrant and engaging environment for both residents and visitors. This strategic move is anticipated to bolster the hospitality and tourism sectors while also generating increased revenue for local businesses.

The district was approved by city council vote Dec. 10.

This carefully chosen zone is home to a variety of establishments, including restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues, creating a walkable and inviting space for visitors to explore.

"The Downtown Conway Entertainment District marks a significant step towards creating a more dynamic and attractive downtown area," said Kim Williams, executive director of the Conway Downtown Partnership. "By encouraging people to visit, supporting local businesses, and fostering a vibrant atmosphere, the district is poised to become a hub of activity and a key driver of economic growth for Conway."

The ordinance also introduces the Temporary Entertainment District Permit, which allows businesses to sell alcoholic beverages for consumption within the district during specific events. This provides an additional revenue stream for the city and encourages businesses to actively participate in the entertainment district.

To ensure responsible consumption, the ordinance includes several regulations. Alcoholic beverages must be purchased from licensed establishments within the district and served in official district containers. Participants must also wear wristbands provided by the licensed establishments. This helps control the flow of alcohol and promotes responsible drinking within the designated area.

One of the key benefits of the entertainment district is its potential to attract more visitors.

The relaxed atmosphere, coupled with the ability to enjoy a drink while strolling through the district, creates a unique and appealing experience for visitors. This, in turn, can lead to increased spending at local businesses outside of normal operating hours, benefiting the overall economy of Conway.

Moreover, the entertainment district is expected to invigorate the hospitality sector. Restaurants and bars within the district can expand their services by offering outdoor seating and hosting special events. The opportunity to socialize and enjoy a drink in a lively outdoor setting can attract more customers, leading to increased revenue and job creation. 🍷



The district is home to a variety of establishments, including restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues, creating a walkable and inviting space for visitors to explore.





Conway has further expanded its recreational offerings with the addition of a new mountain bike trail at Meadows Technology Park in south Conway. The trail hosted two Arkansas National Interscholastic Cycling Association events in the fall, welcoming hundreds of riders from across the state.

# Investing in Conway's Future: Quality-of-Place Projects Enhance Connectivity and Community

Conway's ongoing investment in quality-of-place projects reflects its commitment to enhancing connectivity, accessibility, and overall quality of life for residents. From transformative transportation infrastructure to recreational and community developments, the city is shaping itself into a hub that supports economic growth and community engagement. These projects — ranging from greenway trails to sports complexes — ensure Conway remains a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

## Connect Conway: A Game-Changer for Transportation

In 2022, the City of Conway secured a \$24.6 million federal grant to launch Connect Conway, a transformative public transportation project designed to improve mobility and accessibility. This initiative will establish a 15-mile greenway trail linking key landmarks, including parks, schools, major employment centers, and retail areas.

Connect Conway will integrate 10 parks, seven schools, three major retail districts, three universities, 14 key employment centers, and 16 neighborhoods into a cohesive transportation network. By prioritizing safety, equity, and accessibility, the project will provide residents

with a viable alternative to car travel, fostering a more connected and sustainable city.

The funding, awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation through the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity discretionary grant program, will support the construction of this ambitious project.

Last April, the Conway City Council approved Crafton Tull for design and engineering work on the Little Creek Plaza and the section east of Interstate 40, while Garver was selected for the segments west of I-40. The first phase includes design review, environmental studies, and right-of-way acquisitions.



# FOCUS: QUALITY OF PLACE

## Pompe Park: Honoring Veterans and Expanding Access

Pompe Park saw the completion of its Veterans Plaza in 2023. The plaza, located on Prince Street, features a grass amphitheater, pavilion, seating areas, and dedicated spaces honoring veterans from each military branch.

Last year, the city completed phase two of the project, adding two pedestrian bridges that connect the plaza to Pompe Park's mountain bike trail and pump track. Further enhancements are on the way, as the Conway City Council approved funding in June for additional parking near Morningside Drive, improved trail connections, and a new restroom facility near the pavilion. These upgrades will ensure greater accessibility and usability for residents and visitors.



Connect Conway will integrate 10 parks, seven schools, three major retail districts, three universities, 14 key employment centers, and 16 neighborhoods into a cohesive transportation network.

## Conway Community Center: A Hub for Recreation and Wellness

In February 2022, Conway voters approved funding for a state-of-the-art community center, a 133,000-square-foot facility set to transform local recreation and fitness offerings. The center will include an eight-lane competition pool, a community fitness center, and an outdoor water area featuring a lazy river, a tot pool, and water slides.

Additional amenities will cater to a wide range of interests, with plans for eight volleyball courts, 12 pickleball courts, an indoor track, a community lounge, and party rooms.

Construction has been progressing steadily, and the city anticipates the grand opening this summer. Once completed, the center will serve as a premier destination for health and wellness, social gatherings, and competitive sports.

## Soccer Complex: Expanding Youth and Recreational Sports

Conway's new soccer complex is set to become a centerpiece for youth and community sports. Approved in the February 2022 special election, the complex will feature 10 fields, a splash pad, a pavilion, and a walking trail.

Situated on 54 acres near Curtis Walker Park and Theodore Jones Elementary School on Museum Road, the facility will significantly expand the city's capacity for local and regional soccer events. With construction well underway, the city expects the first soccer season at the new complex to kick off this spring.



The Connect Conway initiative will establish a 15-mile greenway trail linking key landmarks.

## Meadows Tech Park Trail: A New Destination for Cyclists

Conway has further expanded its recreational offerings with the addition of a new mountain bike trail at Meadows Technology Park in south Conway. Designed as a mostly green trail, it features an easy-flowing single track with progression elements such as berms and rollers, making it suitable for riders of varying skill levels.

The trail plays a key role in the local cycling community, hosting two Arkansas National Interscholastic Cycling Association events last fall. With growing interest in outdoor recreation, this new trail underscores the city's commitment to promoting an active lifestyle. 🌿

**Why are quality-of-place projects, such as Connect Conway and the new community center, essential to the city's long-term growth and development?** Quality-of-place projects like Connect Conway and the new Conway Community Center are essential to the city's long-term growth and development because they help attract and retain residents, boost economic development, and enhance overall community well-being.

These unique amenities on the horizon, coupled with the amenities our community already has to offer, will help Conway stand out from our peers.

**How do these investments in infrastructure, recreation, and public spaces contribute to economic development and attract businesses to Conway?** Young professionals, families, and companies prioritize livability when choosing where to settle. Projects that improve walkability, bike ability, and recreational opportunities make Conway much more appealing to skilled employees looking for vibrant, livable communities.

**How do these initiatives reflect the city's commitment to sustainability and improving overall health and wellness for the community?** These initiatives reflect the city's commitment to putting in the work to ensure all residents, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to top-notch recreational amenities.

Safe, connected public spaces not only encourage physical activity and mental wellbeing, but also create gathering spaces where residents can connect and strengthen the fabric of our community.



**Background:** Bart Castleberry became mayor of the City of Conway in 2017. He is a lifelong resident and graduated from Conway High School. He and his wife, Melissa, have been married 40 years and have owned four successful businesses, including Needs Creek Family Farm.

Castleberry previously served as chief of the Conway Fire Department for 20 years, and also served as director of permits and inspections for the City of Conway. He began his third term as mayor in January.

**Looking ahead, what other quality-of-place projects or improvements can residents expect?** In the near future, residents can expect to see a continued commitment to improving accessibility, safety, and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the city. Projects will include improving sidewalk connectivity and extending our trail network to meet the demands of future generations. 🌱

## WHAT'S THAT GONNA BE?

### Swig is Bringing Dirty Sodas to Conway

Swig, the renowned Utah-based chain specializing in "dirty sodas," is set to expand its presence in Arkansas with a new location in Conway.

The upcoming store will be situated at 890 Exchange Avenue, Suite 103, within a newly developed retail space by Covington Properties. This 4,800-square-foot development will also house a Jimmy John's restaurant, while a third space, approximately 1,000 square feet in size, remains available for lease, with no confirmed tenant at this time.

The exact opening date for Swig's Conway location has not yet been announced.

Founded in 2010 in St. George, Utah, Swig has expanded significantly over the past decade, now boasting more than 100 locations nationwide. The Conway store will mark the company's third location in Arkansas, joining existing stores in Springdale and Rogers.

Swig has gained widespread popularity for its signature "dirty sodas," which are soft drinks infused with flavored syrups, creams, and fruit purées, creating a uniquely customizable beverage experience. Some of its most well-known offerings include the Dirty Dr. Pepper (a Dr. Pepper-based drink with coconut and lime flavors), the DDD (a variation on the Dirty Dr. Pepper), and Life's a Peach (a peach-flavored soda creation).



Beyond its signature sodas, Swig's menu extends to a variety of other specialty beverages, including customized energy drinks, boba teas, and fruit-infused sparkling waters. Additionally, the chain offers an assortment of sweet treats such as cookies, pretzel bites, and other baked goods, making it a popular destination for those seeking both refreshing drinks and indulgent snacks. 🌱



## EDUCATION

**Central Baptist College** has hired **Michael Davis** as its new Professional Adult College Education department chair and director of online studies. He most recently served as an adjunct professor in the business department.

As PACE Department Chair and Director of Online Studies, Davis will develop, articulate, and foster a vision for the department. He will also engage in the department's curriculum plan to include new programs and degree ideas beneficial to the PACE Department.



BRUNER

The **University of Central Arkansas** has hired **Jeremy Bruner** as its associate vice president of finance. Bruner will oversee the areas of financial accounting, scholarship compliance, student accounts, post-award grants, and finance technical support. He will also be responsible for construction accounting. He previously worked at UCA as its controller from 2013 to 2022.

## HEALTH CARE

**Baptist Health** has promoted **Janet Marshall** to chief development officer of its foundation. Marshall had served in the interim role for more than three months. She started at Baptist Health in 1992.



MARSHALL



CRUZ

**Conway Regional Health System** has hired **Katie Cruz** as a neonatal nurse practitioner in its neonatal intensive care at **Conway Regional Medical Center**. Cruz brings over eight years of experience caring for critically ill infants at **Arkansas Children's Hospital**.

## TECHNOLOGY

**Mainstream Technologies** has hired **Jericho Franklin** as a client success consultant. Franklin will be responsible for developing and maintaining advisory relationships with customers.

**Chris Johnson** has been hired as a project engineer. He will be responsible for assessing, designing, and implementing technological solutions for customers.

## Conductor Taps Leslie McColgan as New Program Director

**Conductor**, a central Arkansas-based entrepreneurial support organization, announced Jan. 20 the appointment of **Leslie McColgan** as its new program director. McColgan brings nearly ten years of experience in healthcare leadership, business development, and strategic partnerships.

In her new role, McColgan will lead the development and management of Conductor's innovative programming, which is designed to lower barriers to entrepreneurship and empower entrepreneurs, innovators, and small business leaders to launch and scale their businesses. McColgan will oversee Conductor's events, services, and initiatives, ensuring the highest quality

and impact for the small business and entrepreneurial community.

"Leslie brings a unique blend of business acumen and strong, established relationships in the business community, along with new energy and ideas," said Grace Rains, Conductor Executive Director. "Her background in business development and strategic partnerships will play a critical role in driving the growth of our entrepreneurial ecosystem."

Prior to joining Conductor, McColgan served as director of physician network development at Conway Regional Medical Center, where she supervised over 30 staff members and spearheaded



McCOLGAN

initiatives to improve quality performance, expand services, and create accessible health-care solutions. She holds a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Central Arkansas. 🌱

## UTILITIES

**Conway Corp** Chief Marketing Officer **Crystal Kemp** has been named president of the Arkansas Women in Power board for 2025. AWIP is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing women in the energy sector.



WHITE

**Lesia White**, call center supervisor, received the Master Performance award in the Outstanding Leadership category at the 2024 Mid-America Cable Telecommunications Association Customer Service Excellence Awards in December.

White started her career part-time at Conway Corp as a customer care specialist before becoming full-time in June 2012. She was promoted to lead customer care specialist in December 2012. She was promoted to her current role in March 2014.

**Michelle Hatfield** has been promoted to customer care specialist II after completing certifications in master account and sales representative with NCTI.



HATFIELD



FREEMAN

**Peyton Freeman**, plant operator apprentice, recently earned his Class IV Water Treatment certification from the Arkansas Department of Health.

**Yolonda Harris**, human resources technician, recently earned her Society for Human Resource Management Certified Professional certification. The SHRM-CP program equips participants with the skills and strategies needed to foster growth, drive performance and empower individuals in their professional journeys. By earning this certification, Harris has demonstrated her commitment to professional excellence and her dedication to supporting and developing others. 🌱



This 5-bed, 3-bath home on Lainey Drive in Conway was the most expensive home sold in Faulkner County in January. It sold for \$718,900 and \$194.61 per square foot.  
Photo courtesy of Zillow

## Home Sales Rise in Conway as Faulkner County’s Most Expensive Listing Fetches \$718K

A 5-bed, 3-bath home on Lainey Drive in Conway was the most expensive home sold in Faulkner County in January. The 3,694 SF home, located on a third of an acre, sold for \$718,900 and \$194.61 per square foot. It was on the market for 128 days.

A 4-bed, 3-bath home on Centennial Club Drive in Conway was the second most-expensive home sold in January. The 3,740 SF home sold for \$600,000 and \$160.43 per square foot.

Two Greenbrier homes were No. 3 and 4 for the month of January. They each sold for more than half a million dollars. A Mayflower home on River Bend Road was No. 5 in January, selling for \$547,000 and \$175.32 per square foot. The two homes in Greenbrier and the Mayflower home were all located on at least one acre of property.

Check more information about the most expensive homes in the table below.

**Monthly County Housing Report**

The number of homes sold in Conway and Faulkner County were up in January, compared to the same month in 2024.

There were 90 homes sold last month in Faulkner County, up one from 89 in 2024. Home sales totaled \$23.9 million in Faulkner County, down slightly from \$24.4 million last year.

In Conway, the number of homes sold was 41, up 12 from the same month last year. Those sales totaled \$11.4 million, up more than \$3 million in January 2024.

The median price of homes and median price per square foot remained steady in Faulkner County. The median price of a home in Faulkner County was up just over a \$1,000 to \$235,000 in January, while the median price per square foot ticked up 12 cents to \$142.27 from last January.

In Conway, the median home price was down to \$237,775 last month, compared with \$247,500 last year. The median price per square foot was up about \$6 to \$150.68.

Home prices in Conway and Faulkner County still trail national averages. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, the median listing price per square foot in the U.S. was \$224 in January, while the median home cost \$419,200.

<b>\$718K</b> Price of top home sold in December	<b>46</b> Average days spent on the market among top five homes	<b>\$594,600</b> Average price of the top five homes
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	ADDRESS	PRICE	PRICE PER SQ. FT.	APPROX. SQ. FT.	BEDS	FULL BATHS	DAYS ON MARKET
1	51700 Lainey Drive, Conway	\$718,900	\$194.61	3,694	5	3	128
2	1920 Centennial Club Drive Conway	\$600,000	\$160.43	3,740	4	3	5
3	95 Republican Loop, Greenbrier	\$557,302	\$193.51	2,880	5	3	0
4	27 Pear Circle, Greenbrier	\$549,800	\$199.93	2,750	3	2	0
5	19 River Bend Road, Mayflower	\$547,000	\$175.32	3,120	4	3	96



# ECONOMY AT A GLANCE

The Key Economic Indicators for Conway & Faulkner County

PRESENTED BY



## LABOR

December 2024

### Civilian Labor Force



**168,547,000**



**1,416,352**

Seasonally Adjusted

U.S.

**167,746,000**

AR

**1,408,277**

Conway

**36,534**

Faulkner Co.

**66,438**

Not Seasonally Adjusted

### Unemployment Rate

U.S.

**4.1%**

Seasonally Adjusted

AR

**3.4%**

U.S.

**3.8%**

AR

**3.4%**

Conway

**2.8%**

Faulkner Co.

**2.9%**

Not Seasonally Adjusted

## TAX COLLECTIONS

January 2025, Year-to-Date

### Total Sales

Conway

2025 **\$182,080,000**

2024 **\$200,560,000**

-9.2% change



**1.75% TAX RATE\***

Faulkner County

2025 **\$246,350,000**

2024 **\$325,120,000**

-24.2% change



**0.5% TAX RATE**

### Restaurant Sales\*

Conway

2025 **\$26,580,000**

2024 **\$25,510,000**

4.2% change



\*includes mixed drink sales

### Hotel Receipts

Conway

2025 **\$1,660,000**

2024 **\$1,670,000**

-0.8% change



## SINGLE FAMILY HOME SALES

### Home Permits

YTD - December 2024

Conway

2025 **9**

2024 **11**

18.2% decrease



### Homes Sold

YTD - January 2025

Conway

2025 **41**

2024 **29**

41.4% increase

Faulkner County

2025 **90**

2024 **89**

1.1% increase

### Home Sales

YTD - January 2025

Conway

2025 **\$11,478,860**

2024 **\$8,354,200**

37.4% increase

Faulkner County

2025 **\$23,925,739**

2024 **\$24,405,750**

1.9% decrease

### Median Home Price

YTD - January 2025

Conway

2025 **\$237,775**

2024 **\$247,500**

3.9% decrease

Faulkner County

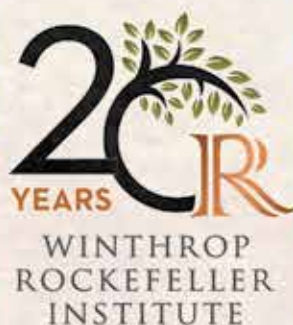
2025 **\$235,000**

2024 **\$233,875**

0.5% increase

View more economic data at [pulseofconway.com](https://pulseofconway.com)

Data is current at the time of printing. \*Methodology Note: Conway figures are now for "Conway City Limits"



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# ORTHOARKANSAS

## EXPERT ORTHOPEDIC CARE CLOSE TO HOME

At OrthoArkansas, we're not just healthcare providers—we're neighbors, and we're committed to helping our Conway community stay active and healthy. Whether it's a sports injury, a chronic condition, or a simple fall, our team is here to offer personalized orthopedic care right in your backyard.

At OrthoArkansas, we offer comprehensive services, including:

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- Sports Medicine
- Hand & Physical Therapy
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