

west of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, 225 miles southeast of Amarillo, Texas; and 140 miles south of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

FROM ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE TO MEDIOCRITY

The early days were filled with excitement and economic vitality. As Wichita Falls entered the 20th century, it was the crossroads for six railroads, setting itself up as a transportation and supply center for a large geographic area serving Northwestern Texas and Southeastern Oklahoma. If the railroads didn't create enough excitement for this High Plains Texas city, the discovery of oil in the early 1900s ushered in another gusher of economic activity. Oil companies and the related activities surrounding a boom town atmosphere created a thriving and vibrant city.

However, it seems like all good things must come to an end, and it finally did in the 1960s. As oil production declined in importance, wildcatters and producers switched their attention to other areas. So, the city switched its economic focus and looked to industry for new growth. Enter a new organization, the Industrial Development, Inc. (the precursor to the present-day Board of Commerce and Industry).

Things again looked promising as new businesses were successfully recruited bringing in new or expanded manufacturing facilities and employment opportunities. Once again, the future looked bright. But, just like in the past, these new economic activities began to evaporate. By the 1980s, manufacturing plant closures combined with a severe decline in oil prices came as a double economic whammy. It must have seemed to many residents that every time things started to look up that the future soon looked gloomy.

In the face of these setbacks, city leaders were not deterred. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Wichita Falls continued to seek economic diversification. Although these efforts resulted in some growth of the manufacturing sector, the economy remained relatively dependent on both the oil sector and government. The city began hosting more and more events, but it didn't seem as though anyone was thinking about tourism as being an economic engine.

The economic picture continued to deteriorate as the gravitational pull and regional transportation linkages with both the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and Oklahoma City continued to increase in importance. In the shadow of these two giants it seemed like Wichita Falls' prominence as a regional trade center were destined to continue fading.

To compete successfully in this changing environment, Wichita Falls was forced to carve out a niche for itself and capitalize on the amenities and assets it could offer that other cities in the region could not. Part of this future was now dependent on recognizing and developing tourism products that would showcase the city and draw in visitors (*City of Wichita Falls, Vision 20/20 Plan*, July 2008).

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Wichita Falls elected a new mayor in 2005. He promised that the city would put into action some type of plan that would revitalize the city. With the downsizing of the largest employer in Wichita Falls, Sheppard Air Force Base, the area economy had taken a major downturn. There was considerable disagreement among the various stakeholder groups of the City—City Council, Economic Development Offices, Chamber of Commerce, and Downtown Council—on how they should proceed to revitalize the economy of Wichita Falls. The new mayor held numerous “Town Hall Meetings” with all the stakeholder groups. He hired a new City Manager, and a consultant to work on City Planning and Priorities. He established an Office of Economic Adjustment to assist the city in dealing with the Air Force base downsizing and resultant loss of jobs and dollars flowing into the economy.