

University of Arkansas Arkansas Newswire

Economic Impact of Garvan Woodland Gardens Tops \$5 Million a Year

Local and state economies both benefit from popular tourist attraction

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Holiday Lights at Garvan Woodland Gardens

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – When the sun sets at Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs people from all over begin to fill the seventeen acres devoted to the annual Holiday Lights display. This is traditionally the single biggest attraction at the Gardens – and since the display opened last month more than 27,000 people have seen the Holiday Lights – a 30 percent increase over last year. Admission revenues are up 96 percent, and apparently many people are also doing some Christmas shopping at the Gardens Gift Shop – sales there are up 7 percent over last year.

The year-round beauty of the Gardens and special exhibits such as Holiday Lights is no secret, but what's less well-known is that Garvan Woodland Gardens has a significant effect on the economies of Hot Springs, Garland County and Arkansas each year. To learn the full extent of that effect Bob Bledsoe, the executive director of Garvan Woodland Gardens, commissioned a study by the Center for Business and Economic Research in the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas. The report was prepared by center director Kathy Deck and her staff and completed in October.

The report, *Estimating the Economic Impact of Garvan Woodland Gardens*, calculated

the Gardens' total impact on the Arkansas economy at more than \$5.8 million, with most of that effect – roughly \$5.3 million – felt in Garland County and Hot Springs. These figures cover direct and indirect effects and are based on the construction and operations dollars spent by the Garland Woodland Gardens in a year; the impact on businesses working for and supplying the Gardens; the money spent by visitors at the Gardens and in other parts of Hot Springs; and the 60 full-time equivalent jobs created both at Garvan Woodland Gardens and by businesses supplying and supporting the Gardens. The report concludes that every \$1 spent in connection with Garvan Woodland Gardens has an economic impact of \$1.78 in Garland County and \$1.82 in the state.

In addition, the Gardens also generate close to \$283,000 in state and local taxes, most of that – \$259,000 worth –in Garland County. These taxes include income, sales and property taxes received from employees, companies and households.

The report recognizes Garvan Woodland Gardens as a significant part of the Hot Springs tourism industry, which is the major economic engine in Hot Springs and Garland County. In fiscal year 2012 there were a record 138,478 paid admissions to the Gardens. The annual Holiday Lights drew nearly 60,000 visitors in November and December. School field trips and tours attracted 1,538 visitors last year and 1,369 attended 55 educational programs for adults. Art and photography exhibits, special events ranging from Daffodil Days to a bridal fair, the summer Children's Adventure Programs and more than 150 weddings also brought large groups of visitors to the Garvan Woodland Gardens.

The vast majority of visitors, about 73 percent, come from Arkansas; 19.5 percent are from Texas or other neighboring states; close to 8 percent are tourists from other states or foreign countries.

The report also points out that Garvan Woodland Gardens has strong community support in Garland County: there were 2,776 members of Garvan Woodland Gardens in 2011 and volunteers contributed 17,575 hours of work to the Gardens.

Verna Cook Garvan, a southern Arkansas businesswoman, founded Garvan Woodland Gardens. . In addition to owning the Malvern Brick and Tile Co. and the Wisconsin Arkansas Lumber Mill, Garvan was a self-taught gardener who in 1956 started developing the gardens area as a possible future home. She bequeathed the property to the department of landscape architecture at the University of Arkansas through the University of Arkansas Foundation in 1993. Garvan Woodland Gardens has grown into a 210-acre botanical garden, with a chapel and many other features, open to the public and operated as an autonomous department of the Fay Jones School of Architecture. The Gardens also receive support from the Arkansas Legislature, the Arkansas Natural and

Cultural Resources Council, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, private donors, and 2,776 members.

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