

Springdale's future.(Tourism)

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PERRY WEBB KNOWS HOW TO eat an elephant.

One bite at a time, said the president of the Springdale Chamber of Commerce, whose organization was instrumental in luring minor league baseball to the city and northwest Arkansas.

The pachyderm is a metaphor for Springdale's image as an also-ran in the area's growth boom after losing its biggest taxpayer--Sam's Club--to Fayetteville and watching new restaurants and retailers choose Benton County.

The first bite, and it is a big one, is the \$33 million, 7,500-seat Arvest Ballpark, where the Northwest Arkansas Naturals will play their first home game on April 10. But even now, with construction speeding along in a city that has had some well-publicized infrastructure problems in the past, some still wonder if Springdale's eyes were bigger than its stomach.

The money invested by the Springdale Chamber on the referendum to approve a \$50 million bond issue--which averaged out to around \$10,000 for each of the 13 decisive votes by which it passed in 2006--was well spent, **Webb** said.

Combining the \$44 million impact from the ballpark construction with the Chamber-commissioned research yields a total economic impact over the course of the Naturals' 20-year lease of \$322 million.

Webb is eager to point out that the \$278 million estimated impact from Naturals baseball is conservative and doesn't consider potential revenue from future development on the acres of pasture land around Arvest Ballpark such as restaurants, retailers or an arena.