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### **Ouachita gives \$50,000 to Arkadelphia MLK Park project**

Felley Lawson

Ouachita News Bureau

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**OUACHITA**  
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



**NEWS**

For immediate release

**Ouachita gives \$50,000 to Arkadelphia MLK Park project**

*By Felley Lawson*

August 25, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University has made a \$50,000 pledge to help fund construction of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park in Arkadelphia, the first organizational contribution to the project.

The MLK Memorial Park Committee is led by honorary co-chairs and Ouachita alumni Fitzgerald Hill and Mitch Bettis, both natives of Arkadelphia. They are seeking to raise \$2.5 million through grass-roots community efforts to develop the park in King's memory.

"Ouachita has been a part of the Arkadelphia since our founding in 1886, and this is an important investment in our community and our shared future," said Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita president. "Our financial commitment was made possible, in part, by a contribution to Ouachita that allows us to join our alumni Fitz Hill and Mitch Bettis."

The park's innovative elliptical design recalls themes from a speech that King delivered in October 1967 to students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia. Titled "What Is Your Life's Blueprint?", the speech inspired students to consider whether they had "a proper, a solid and a sound blueprint" for their lives. Two ideas in particular resonate with the park planning committee: King's counsel that one's life blueprint should be guided by "a deep belief in your own dignity, your own worth and your own somebody-ness," and that it should include "the determination to achieve excellence."

Committee members share the goal of creating an accessible, inclusive park that reflects a commitment to providing a solid foundation for individuals and for the community. Initial plans for the layout include an amphitheater, a civil rights educational trail, a splash pad and a Youth Empowerment Zone with playground equipment and basketball courts.

"This park will be constructed for everyone, which was the core of Dr. King's dream," said Hill, who serves as CEO of the Arkansas Baptist College Foundation. "I felt my involvement in this 'Dream Park' would allow me to be a part of bringing our city together."

By giving to help fund the park's development, he added, "It is my prayer Ouachita can play a major role in unifying our city."

"Ouachita is an important partner in this journey because it's long been a place that encouraged its students and staff to make a meaningful impact on our community and our world," said Bettis, owner and president of Arkansas Business Publishing Group in Little Rock. "Dr. Sells and Ouachita were quick to join this effort, and that leadership was instrumental in getting the project started now."

Bettis was born at Clark County Memorial Hospital, which once occupied the corner lot at 15<sup>th</sup> and Pine Streets in Arkadelphia where MLK Memorial Park will be built.

“Now it will be a gathering place where new memories are made,” he said. “I’m so proud that future generations will bring their children to this place to play, community members will gather together and tourists will get off I-30 to commemorate the life and work of Dr. King as well as celebrate our wonderful community.”

When Hill contemplates a time that the park will be open to the public, “I can already hear the children playing on the splash pads. I can see people stopping through Arkadelphia to experience the ‘Dream Park.’ It’s safe to assume that in the year 2121, the ‘Dream Park’ will still be open and sharing the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”

He added, “This park will serve as some of the fruits of the civil rights seeds planted while Dr. King walked this earth.”

Hill and Bettis are joined on the MLK Memorial Park leadership team by Arkadelphia Assistant Mayor Roland Gosey, chairman; Arkadelphia Mayor Dr. Scott Byrd, also a Ouachita graduate; and Arkadelphia City Manager Gary Brinkley. For more information about the park project, visit [mlkjrpark.org](http://mlkjrpark.org).