

MESQUITE: BRINGING AN INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE RODEO CAPITAL OF TEXAS

Kim Buttram's favorite two words to describe Mesquite are *accessible* and *frontier*.

As the city's Director of Economic Development, *accessible* is Buttram's preferred term to *affordable*. While many cities' cost of living has skyrocketed, land and housing in Mesquite are still modestly priced, especially considering all the amenities Mesquite offers. Known as the Rodeo Capital of Texas, Mesquite is proud of its work-hard, play-hard image. And with over 10,000 new homes and 16 million square feet of industrial space in the pipeline, investors are taking note.

Buttram's team has overseen significant reinvestment in the city's original town center, Downtown Mesquite, which is being reinvented as a place for public art, new restaurants, and local entrepreneurs. "We love big business, but we also want Mesquite to be known as a place where you can bring your business to life," states Buttram. "Our new farmers market is becoming an incubator for brick-and-mortar ideas."

Accessible also refers to Mesquite's status as a transportation hub. It is situated at the intersection of four major freeways—I-30, I-635, I-20, and US 80—giving employers easy access to the entire metroplex workforce. This advantage explains the longevity of some of Mesquite's major employers, such as Orora Visual and Fritz Industries, each boasting over 50 years and multiple expansions in the city. Mesquite is the site of an executive airport, too, Mesquite Metro Airport, with over 150 hangars and more than 250 landings and takeoffs per day. Nearby is one of the nation's busiest Union Pacific intermodals, facilitating the shipping of large freight containers. It's a reminder of Mesquite's past as a railroad town.

Buttram's other word, *frontier*, alludes to the abundance of virgin land available for development in the area known as Trinity Pointe Mesquite.

"Thanks to the tenacity of our city leaders, there's a lot happening along I-20 in Dallas County and into adjacent Kaufman County," says Buttram. "We have six million square feet of industrial development going up there, with surrounding prime retail sites, as well as thousands of homes in master-planned communities."

This overall spate of new commercial development began with Urban District 30, a nearly million-square-foot industrial park built by Dallas-based Urban Logistics Realty. That project broke ground in early 2020 and is expected to generate over 500 jobs.

"It's helped up our game," says Buttram. "The Class A development has attracted a manufacturing expansion and a well-known Internet retailer thus far."



Kim Buttram (left) and
Lexie Woodward of
the City of Mesquite



The Mesquite Championship Rodeo



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Buttram, who was appointed director earlier this year, leads a busy six-person staff. They're currently running fast—attracting investment, shepherding projects, working with partners to develop the local workforce, managing the convention and visitors bureau, and more. In addition to US companies making inquiries, they also see interest from foreign companies, especially from Asia.

One of Buttram's key employees is Economic Development Manager Lexie Woodward, who joined the Mesquite team in January. She previously served in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua, in AmeriCorps, and in economic development roles in Illinois, Arizona, and Texas.

Buttram and Woodward's strengths are uniquely suited to each other. Buttram, who worked her way up to director from an administrative assistant role at the Forney Economic Development Corporation, is a straight-shooting, high-energy visionary. By her own admission, she enjoys taking risks and pushing envelopes. That makes the more measured Woodward her perfect foil; she takes a more pragmatic approach and often takes the lead on frameworking projects and creating the checklists. "There are so many moving parts and a long list of steps, from dirt to ribbons, and Lexie keeps us on track," Buttram said admiringly.

Buttram and Woodward note that the structure of their organization is a little different from others in the area. Specifically, theirs is not a typical 4A/4B economic development corporation that allocates local sales tax for economic development projects; their 4B is instead a quality of life corporation that primarily supports the city's 80-plus parks. "So, we have to be very creative with incentives," says Buttram.

Still, Mesquite offers plenty of advantages that help it land projects without sales-tax funding. One of those

is a distinctive appeal for companies that want to unify corporate and manufacturing headquarters in one place.

Buttram points to a global furniture company, Elements International, as an example: "They put their warehouse distribution and their headquarters together here in Mesquite. You've got this headquarter-level design, open space, lots of glass, cool names for all the meeting rooms. Then behind that, in the same building, they've got their warehouse distribution.

"The fact that they can put all that under one roof and access a diverse workforce of corporate and warehouse talent—that's one reason Mesquite is so attractive."

LIGHTNING ROUND:

Kim Buttram

Favorite Texas product?

Texas wine

Most admired Texas CEO?

Herb Kelleher

Most important part of your morning routine?

Prayer and coffee

Best advice you ever got?

Remember that everyone has to put their pants on one leg at a time. —Dad

LIGHTNING ROUND:

Lexie Woodward

Favorite Texas product?

Leather

First job?

Some of my first jobs in high school were as a kennel tech at a vet, an ice cream slinger at Baskin-Robbins, and a floor guard at a roller-skating rink.

Favorite part of your job?

Being a part of a local business's and/or development's success. And meeting and hearing the stories of successful and humble founders and CEOs.

Something most people don't know about you?

I used to be a speed skater—inline and ice.