Selected as one of “The 100 Best Small Towns in America” in Norman Crapton’s book by the same title, Poteau is one of the most unique towns in the region. During the early days, the area around Poteau was known as an Outlaw Haven. Ft. Smith was the last stop for the law. Once one crossed the Arkansas border, they entered into Indian Territory, where U.S. law no longer applied. During those early days, the small wild west town of Poteau Switch was full of excitement. While many moved here for economic advantage, others came to escape the law.

Over 100 years later, Poteau is still a vibrant and exciting city to live in. While it’s kept that small town feel, it has matured to offer much of what many large cities have.

We welcome you to explore all that Poteau has to offer. Our downtown area has experienced a rebirth and is now known as a true destination point. Events held throughout the city draw in thousands of people yearly. In Poteau, you can find everything from a state of the art convention venue down to grandma’s home cooked meals. It offers a blend of old and new, with a unique atmosphere that makes it truly one of the best 100 small towns in America.

About this Guide

The purpose of this guide is to give potential business owners a broad overview of the status of downtown. It should be used as a starting point for businesses considering locating their business downtown.

While this guide is intended to provide a brief overview of the downtown business district, it also provides a lot of great information about business and industry throughout the whole city.

This guide is published by Historic Downtown Poteau, inc.
Top 5 Reasons to do Business in Downtown Poteau

• **Steady Traffic:** Being in the heart of the Old Town District ensures that you’ll be seen. The average weekly traffic counts along Dewey Avenue (Main Street) average more than 3,000 vehicles a day. Downtown Poteau offers a walkability score of over 60. This is in contrast with the U.S. average score of 48. The downtown district is the only area in Poteau that is fully sidewalk accessible, meaning that there is a consistent flow of pedestrian foot traffic.

• **Lower Rent:** On average, rents in the downtown district range from $300 per month to $800 per month. In contrast, rental rates outside the downtown district can run $1,000 or more per month. For small to medium sized businesses, including start-ups, locating your business in downtown Poteau simply makes good financial sense.

• **Community Atmosphere:** With over 500 employees downtown, the district has a unique community “feel” to it. Businesses help one another out. This business network helps downtown thrive. Downtown Poteau can be thought of as an “outdoor mall”; businesses working together help bring in and retain new customers.

• **Steady Growth:** Since 2013, Downtown Poteau has seen strong growth. Following the fires in the early 1980’s, the downtown district entered into a period of steep decline. A new revitalization program was instituted in 2013 which helped reduce the vacancy rate from over 50% to less than 7% in 2016.

• **The “Hub” of Poteau:** Two main roads intersect the downtown area. McKenna comes in from the south from the college and Witte runs towards the north and connects the downtown residential district. Both of these roads, along with traffic from Broadway, bring a significant number of people downtown. In essence, the downtown district is the “hub” of several major roads.

Fast Facts about Poteau

Did you know...

Poteau is over 100 years old? Founded in the late 1800’s, the town was once known as a wild and rugged place where bandits and outlaws roamed freely. People such as Belle Starr, Cole Younger, and Frank James were frequent visitors here.

The last successful robbery of Bonnie and Clyde’s career happened in Downtown Poteau.

Poteau is known for one of it’s main attractions: Cavanal Hill, the tallest hill in the world.

Some of the earliest white settlers here were French, which is where Poteau derives it’s name from. Poteau means “Post”, and was named for a French Fur trading post located at the base of Cavanal. Cavanal is another French word meaning Cavernous.

Poteau’s Dunbar School was the first all black school in Oklahoma to be integrated.
About the Old Town District

Poteau’s historic district was formed by an accident. The original town was centered around today’s courthouse lawn and stretched North to South. A great fire destroyed this original town in the 1890’s.

With the arrival of the Frisco and KCS railroads, the old town was abandoned and buildings began rising up along Dewey Avenue. The peak of this building frenzy came during the roaring 20’s.

Another series of fires threatened to destroy the downtown district in the early 1980’s. These fires took out the old Victory Theater, along with several other historic buildings. Downtown Poteau was rebuilt and the majority of the old buildings were saved. Today, Dewey and the blocks to the north and south define the Old Town District.

In the mid-1980’s, the downtown area entered a period of steep decline. With urban expansion, many of the buildings were left vacant and in disrepair.

An ambitious project began in 2013 to preserve the old buildings and revitalize the downtown area. Since then, over 5 million dollars has been reinvested into the downtown area through private donations. In addition, the City of Poteau implemented a program to help upgrade the infrastructure.

Today, the downtown area can boast of having new streets and sidewalks, a large employment base, numerous specialty shops and eateries, as well as an outdoor park for hosting events and activities.

Some of the major attractions downtown include places such as Warehouse Willy’s, The Purple Plume, Peppercorn Antique Mall, Bridgman’s, and La Cabana Authentic Mexican Restaurant. The former Lowrey Hotel was transformed in to a three story museum and features rotating exhibits and indoor activities. The Town Square hosts the Poteau Farmer’s Market and Bazaar. During the holiday season, a large synchronized light show and other attractions fill the downtown area.

Numerous major events happen downtown as well, including the large Wheels n Deals Car Show. Other events include parades, festivals, and historical reenactments.

Downtown Poteau is enjoying a period of rebirth. It is a fascinating blend of old and new, populated by friendly faces, fascinating shops, and vivacious growth.
Shopping downtown Poteau has never been easier. The recent upgrades with parking and pedestrian accessibility has transformed the downtown area into a true destination point. Combine that with pedestrian friendly zones and you have a recipe for retail success!

Downtown Poteau is rapidly expanding. The core downtown district (shaded yellow) is the most developed and features a wide variety of retail and eating establishments. Currently, work is progressing on revitalizing the remaining areas of the downtown district (shaded red). While Dewey Avenue is the most populated of the downtown roads, many businesses are springing up along Witte and McKenna streets.

Several new projects have significantly helped improve the downtown retail environment. A new sign at the end of Dewey helps direct travelers to the old town district. After arriving in the old town district, visitors are welcomed by freshly painted buildings, pedestrian friendly zones, a beautifully landscaped Town Square, and many new anchor stores that draw in a significant amount of traffic.

One of the biggest assets to the downtown area is the resources offered by Historic Downtown Poteau, inc. Along with business planning and development, HDP assists with marketing on an individual basis. In addition, HDP promotes the entire downtown district as a welcome destination point.

To date, there are over 500 employees downtown, along with 17 apartments. Downtown Poteau now employs 13.157% of Poteau’s population. This has been one of the most rapidly growing areas in Poteau in recent years.
Downtown Business Opportunities

Bi-yearly, Historic Downtown Poteau, Inc. conducts surveys to analyze what types of businesses county residents most want to see downtown. Used in conjunction with market data provided by the City of Poteau, this gives a good overview of the desired businesses needed downtown. These are businesses that there is a high demand for and include, in order of demand:

- Department Stores: According to market research, this opportunity has the largest variance between supply and demand, with most residents highly desiring more department store options. *(Supply/Demand gap in excess of 13m)*
- Full Service Restaurants, Eateries: Residents feel that there are not enough unique places to eat in Poteau. They would most like to see places that offer breakfast and lunch items. *(Supply/Demand gap in excess of 7m)*
- Entertainment: Residents feel that there is simply not enough to do. Most surveys have indicated that residents have a desire for live music and dining, children’s events and activities, and local “teen” recreation destinations.
- Clothing and Apparel: One of the most requested types of shops revolves around new trendy, affordable clothing and accessories. *(Supply/Demand gap in excess of 8m)*
- Children’s Toys, Apparel, and other: When asked, many residents requested more locations that offered items geared towards babies and children. This also includes “hobby shop” type locations.
- “Booth-based” types of businesses: These types of businesses would provide facilities for independent vendors to rent out booth spaces, or “Pop up shops”. Requests have been for themed shops, such as Shabby Chic or Home Decor.
- Specialty Retail Boutiques: Many residents have requested more themed specialty shopping venues.
- Health and Beauty Shops: Residents desire more options for purchasing specialty health and beauty aids. *(Supply/Demand gap in excess of 11m)*
- Other requested shopping includes: Pet stores, shoe stores, fine jewelry, art/craft supplies, sporting goods, and books. *(Supply/Demand gap in excess of 2m)*

Parking and Infrastructure Improvements

Work has been ongoing throughout the downtown district to help improve the traffic infrastructure. These improvements include:

- New sidewalks which create a much more comfortable feel throughout the downtown district.
- Newly laid asphalt along the main roads.
- Road widening project nearly completed.
- Parking upgrades along Dewey, with planned redevelopment of existing parking areas.
- New road paint, allowing for safer pedestrian access, safer parking angles, and a fresh, clean feel.
- New handicap accessible intersections
- New “old world” stop signs installed, allowing for smoother traffic flow and safer pedestrian access.
- New drainage systems installed throughout the downtown district.

There are several planned projects that will be ongoing. These include:

- Entrance “Archway” to enhance the old town appeal.
- Creation of more greenspaces and “bump-outs”.
- New asphalt for adjacent roads neighboring the downtown district.

Further developments are being considered which will even further enhance the appeal of the downtown district.
Poteau is a vibrant city with a small town feel. Despite its size, the town offers a wide variety of recreation, entertainment and fitness opportunities, as listed here:

**Parks and Recreation**

- Poteau's Town Square (Downtown)
- Skatepark off Broadway (Downtown)
- Dunbar Park (Located near Downtown)
- Bill J. Barber Park
- Twyman Park (Also, City Park)
- Cavanal Hill
- Rotary Outdoor Complex (Under Construction)

**Golf Courses**

- Choctaw Country Club and Golf Course
- Wolf Ridge Country Club and Golf Course

**Entertainment**

- Tower Drive In and Movie Theater
- Skatereation
- Strike-a-Lot Bowling
- Yellow Cottage Studios (Painting Parties and Artist Studio)
- Artie's (Painting Parties and Artist Studio, geared towards children)

**Museums**

- LeFlore County Museum at Hotel Lowrey (Downtown)

**Fitness**

- Old Frisco Trail (Jogging Path)
- Poteau Family Fitness
- Poteau Crossfit (Downtown)
- Poteau City Parc (Poteau Area Recreational Complex)
- Carl Albert State College Recreational Area

**Area Attractions**

- Maple Creek Blueberry Farm
- Long Lake Resort
- Kerr Mansion (Historic Site and Home)
- Choctaw Casino-Pocola
- Spiro Mounds Archeological Site
- Heavener Runestone Park (Archeological Site)
- Winding Stair Mountains
- Lake Wister State Park
- Tri-State Speedway
- Cedar Lake Recreation Area
- Peter Conser Home (Historic Site and Home)
- Wild Things Farm

**Downtown Events**

- Old Town Farmer's Market and Bazaar; this event is held from Spring through Fall in the Downtown Town Square and features produce, Angus Beef, pork, canned goods, crafts, arts, and a variety of other booths. Vendor set up is free as this is hosted as a community service.
- Wheels ~n~ Deals Car Show; This event brings in a large crowd every year and serves as a great marketing opportunity.
- Festivals; a variety of festivals are held downtown each year with varying themes.
- Town Square Events; These events include everything from Movies in the Park to live music performances. The Town Square is also available to the community to use for individual or public events.
- Rotating exhibits; The Museum features different rotating exhibits, as well as a variety of fun activities for the entire family.
- Parades; the City of Poteau hosts several parades throughout the year, including the Christmas Parade and the Rodeo Parade. These events draw in huge crowds.
- Old Town Christmas Light Extravaganza; This event runs from November through the start of January and features a synchronized light show as well as a variety of smaller attractions, including window
Revitalizing Downtown

In 2012, an ambitious new program was proposed that would help transform the downtown area. The key was to do this in a way that kept the original charm of the town while at the same time bringing it in to the modern world. This was done with a series of low-cost projects that didn't solely rely on tax payer money.

This program involves numerous phases, some of which are still being completed today. These phases include the following:

- Fix and acquire existing and new movable assets, such as benches and planters.
- Paint and repair exteriors of buildings, with an average of two painted per year.
- Repair or fix existing sidewalks
- Repair and restripe the main roads with an eye to design and function.
- Create more green spaces and public resting areas.
- Upgrade the Town Square (Pocket Park) so that more live events can be hosted downtown, as well as providing a free venue for people needing an outdoor space for events.
- General maintainence and clean up, including removing vines from buildings, clearing out trash and brush, and so on.
- Institute and expand the downtown business base by economic development projects, business retention projects, and enhanced marketing.

While many of these projects have been completed, or are ongoing, there is still much to be done.

In 2012, an ambitious new program was proposed that would help transform the downtown area. The key was to do this in a way that kept the original charm of the town while at the same time bringing it in to the modern world. This was done with a series of low-cost projects that didn't solely rely on tax payer money.

This program involves numerous phases, some of which are still being completed today. These phases include the following:

- Fix and acquire existing and new movable assets, such as benches and planters.
- Paint and repair exteriors of buildings, with an average of two painted per year.
- Repair or fix existing sidewalks
- Repair and restripe the main roads with an eye to design and function.
- Create more green spaces and public resting areas.
- Upgrade the Town Square (Pocket Park) so that more live events can be hosted downtown, as well as providing a free venue for people needing an outdoor space for events.
- General maintainence and clean up, including removing vines from buildings, clearing out trash and brush, and so on.
- Institute and expand the downtown business base by economic development projects, business retention projects, and enhanced marketing.

While many of these projects have been completed, or are ongoing, there is still much to be done.
Historically, Poteau has been a thriving seat of industrial activity for LeFlore County. In the downtown district, and just outside, there are three major industrial manufacturing plants. These include Falcon Manufacturing, Poteau Panel Shop, Inc., and Animal Supplement Company. Along the KCS tracks, there is a lot of expansion opportunities for the right business. In addition, the City of Poteau maintains the Poteau Industrial Park, which stretches more than 2.5 miles between 271 and the Old Wister Highway. Along with the railroad line, proposals for future expansion for more arterial roads is under consideration, which would provide the infrastructure to further expand industrial opportunity. With the arrival of Dobson, Poteau now offers up to 50 mbps which would meet the needs of any large business.
Demographics and Community Report

Downtown Poteau serves as the hub for much of Northern LeFlore County. The County Courthouse, LeFlore County Sheriff’s Department, Poteau City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, Poteau’s police station, Poteau’s Fire Station, and the area hospital are all located within the downtown district, as well as Historic Downtown Poteau, inc.

These entities serve a local population of over 8,000. As of 2015, the population demographics are as follows:

City Limit Population 8,704
City Daytime Population 13,872
Trade Area Population 29,173
Population Change 2001-2014:
  City Limits 2.30%
  Population Change 2001-2014:
  Trade Area 0.13%

Households - Trade Area
Households: 10,766
Average Household Income: $50,325
Median Housing Value: $76,891
Owner Occupied: 64.49%
No. Households with Income > $100k: 1,102

Education Levels - Trade Area
High School 6,728
Bachelors Degree 10,077
Post Bachelors Degree 10,202

Workforce Availability - Trade Area
In Labor Force 12,238
Unemployment Rate 7.18%
Average Salary $38,816

Poteau’s cost of living index is 80.50
(An amount below 100 means Poteau, Oklahoma is cheaper than the US average.)

Employee Salary and Demand
Average Salary $38,816
National Average Salary $45,682

Average Weather Statistics
Annual Maximum Avg. Temperature: 71.0 °F
Annual Minimum Avg. Temperature: 50.0 °F
Annual Avg. Temperature: 60.3 °F
Percent of Possible Sunshine: 62%

Distance to Major Metro Areas
Oklahoma City: 192 miles
Tulsa: 126 miles
Dallas, TX : 234 miles

Data provided by Clrsearch.com and by the City of Poteau.
Poteau Education

Poteau Primary School
Grades: K-2nd | Enrollment: 735

Poteau Upper Elementary School
Grades: 3-5 | Enrollment: 543

Pansy Kidd Middle School
Grades: 6-8 | Enrollment: 518

Poteau High School
Grades: 9-12 | Enrollment: 619
Poteau High School is the 78th largest public high school in Oklahoma and the 8,918th largest nationally. It has a student teacher ratio of 15.8 to 1.

High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2010-2014: 82.7%

Carl Albert State College
4 Year college | Total enrollment of 2,458 (2016) | Student-faculty ratio is 24-1
The school utilizes a semester-based academic calendar. The highest degree offered at Carl Albert State College is an associate degree. The school has an open admissions policy and offers credit for life experiences. The in-state tuition and fees for 2013-14 were $2,808, and out-of-state tuition and fees were $5,808. There is no application fee. Students can earn degrees and certificates in 18 different fields. Popular programs include: Health Professions and Related Programs, Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services, and Education.

Bachelor’s degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2010-2014: 17.3%

Kiamichi Technology Center
This school provides training for industries located in the area

River Valley Cosmetology Institute
Government

A message from Mayor Jeff Shockley:

Poteau is a growing, vibrant city offering a unique blend of history, culture, and commerce for residents and visitors to enjoy. Poteau is located about 25 miles southwest of Fort Smith, Arkansas, 130 miles southeast of Tulsa and 198 miles southeast of Oklahoma City. Poteau is almost completely surrounded by mountains. Looking eastward across the Poteau River, one can see in the distance the famous towering Sugar Loaf Mountain Peak. On the southern horizon can be seen the Winding Stair Mountain Range, the foothills of the Kiamichi’s where Talimena Scenic Byway is located. Immediately on the west is Cavanal Hill the world tallest hill!

Poteau city government is committed to delivering the highest quality of public service to the community. We are constantly striving to ensure that Poteau remains a welcoming, livable, and attractive environment for all our residents, businesses, and visitors.

The city is governed by the statutory aldermanic or mayor council form of government. The powers of the city are vested in the mayor and city council. City Council consists of eight members, with two selected from each ward of the city.

Regular City Council meetings are held at 7:00 p.m. on the first Monday of each month inside the council chamber at City Hall.

Poteau City Hall is located downtown at 111 Peters Street. To contact City Hall, call (918) 647-4191.

Poteau is the county seat of LeFlore County. LeFlore County is part of the Fort Smith, AR-OK Metropolitan Statistical Area. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma is the federal district court with jurisdiction in LeFlore County.

The county has a total area of 1,609 square miles. Currently, there are an estimated 50,000 people living in LeFlore County. Of which, 26,000 are within a 15 minute radius of the county courthouse.

The courthouse is located at 100 S Broadway Street in Downtown Poteau.
Doing business in Poteau is easy. Considered a Business Friendly City, there are not a lot of requirements to get set up and going. The only requirements that exist is if you will be serving alcohol.

The type of business you select depends on where you will be able to establish your business. Poteau consists of three commercial zones, and three industrial zones. Downtown Poteau is zoned as the Central Business District, or C1. Permitted businesses for the C1 district are located to the left; for other business zones, consult the City of Poteau code book located on the City of Poteau website. Some areas located downtown are zoned industrial. For questions about these zones, contact Historic Downtown Poteau, inc.

To start your business, first decide on how you want to incorporate. Most small businesses are sole proprietorships or Limited Liability Corporations. Before deciding on a type of business, do your research to determine the best time for your enterprise.

A sole proprietorship is the simplest business form under which one can operate a business. The sole proprietorship is not a legal entity. It simply refers to a person who owns the business and is personally responsible for its debts.

It is recommended that businesses form a Limited Liability Corporation. A limited liability company (LLC) is the United States-specific form of a private limited company. It is a business structure that combines the pass-through taxation of a partnership or sole proprietorship with the limited liability of a corporation. As such, you have additional tax and government protections.

Once you have determined your type of business, register your business name with the Oklahoma Secretary of State. This is a Fictitious Name, also called DBA (“Doing Business As”). To do this, first check to ensure the business name is available by going to the Ok. Secretary of State website and use their lookup tool. If the name is available, contact the Poteau Daily News for a DBA listing. By federal law, this name has to be ran three times in a local paper to ensure that the name is available and that there are no objects. Once that is complete, contact the Oklahoma Secretary of State to get the required forms to register this name.

If anyone other than you will work for your business, you must obtain a Federal Employer Identification Number or EIN. Do this by contacting the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and requesting a new business packet. Setting up your business taxes is relatively easy. There are many resources on the IRS website that will help guide you through the process.

Once you have filed your business with the Oklahoma Secretary of State and with the Internal Revenue Service then you have the legal requirements out of the way. It is strongly suggested that you prepare a business plan, a financial plan, and a marketing plan prior to opening doors. By doing this research first, you will be providing your business with a path to success. For further information, see the following page, “Business Resources”.

No matter what type of business you would like to start, you’ll find that Poteau is a great place to do business. For those wanting to locate in Historic Downtown Poteau, you’ll find that the downtown community is unlike anything else around.
In-City Business Resources

City of Poteau:
www.poteau-ok.com

Provides information about local government and departments, economic development, news and events.

City of Poteau Code Book:
Provides information on laws enacted by the City of Poteau. For downtown specific information, review results labeled as “Commercial-1”

Poteau Chamber of Commerce:
Directory and resource for business and commercial development in the city of Poteau.
poteauchamber.com

Historic Downtown Poteau, Inc.:
Directory and resource for business and commercial development in the downtown district, as well as shopping information and event information.
HistoricDowntownPoteau.com

Poteau Daily News:
General circulation newspaper serving Poteau and the greater LeFlore county area.
www.poteaudailynews.com

Other Business Resources

Oklahoma Secretary of State:
Hosts required information and legal forms required to start a business.
www.sos.ok.gov/business/infoSB.aspx
Main Site: www.sos.ok.gov

Internal Revenue Service (IRS):
Hosts required information and legal forms required to start a business.
www.ok.gov/tax

OKCommerce:
Provides information about doing business in Oklahoma, as well as offering tips and suggestions on running a business.
okcommerce.gov/business/startup/

REI:
REI Oklahoma has focused on promoting economic growth and job creation for more than three decades. REI Oklahoma works with partners across the state to create opportunities and provide resources to individuals, businesses and entrepreneurs. From technical assistance and training, to lending programs and down payment assistance for Oklahoma home buyers, REI Oklahoma is committed to positively impacting businesses and communities in Oklahoma.
http://www.reiok.org/

SCORE:
Do you have an idea for a small business but don’t know where to start? Do you already have a small business and want to expand, but need some tips and advice? Is your small business struggling and you need some expert help getting it back on track? SCORE is here to help!
tulsa.score.org
Thank you for your interest in doing business in Historic Downtown Poteau! We have done our best to present you with the most reliable, up to date information that’s available. All of the information contained herein is accurate as of October, 2016. This booklet is published every three to five years, or as needed as information changes.

This booklet was prepared by Historic Downtown Poteau, inc., with assistance from The City of Poteau and local businesses. It was printed by GCT in Downtown Poteau.