

Making Ripples

Uber Northwest Arkansas

by Amanda Bancroft

Driving for Uber used to be risky in Northwest Arkansas, but now it's earned a legal stamp of approval. For riders, it's always been legal, and now the public can benefit more than ever after last year's passage of Act 1050 permitting ride-hailing companies to operate as long as they apply for an operation certificate from the Arkansas Public Service Commission, meeting all the requirements to qualify for that certificate. These measures, according to the new law, are meant "To ensure the safety, reliability, and cost-effectiveness of transportation network services, and preserve and enhance access to transportation options for the state's residents and visitors."

According to the Uber Fayetteville page, drivers can earn money on their own terms, whether full-time or part-time, that gives them the flexibility to work as often or as little as they like. Penny Gray of Fayetteville is considering becoming an Uber driver. "I like the idea of driving for Uber because I will be able to fit around my family's schedule, meet new people, and they pay weekly," she says. "I think it will be a great summer job for me."

Driving for Uber has its ups and downs, according to the Uber driver's forum. These include drunk passengers, slow business, ineffective ratings, and being responsible for car maintenance. Drivers are not considered employees, but independent contractors using the Uber app, which makes sense but offers no benefits to drivers.

For riders, the available ride options include the UberX or low-cost Uber with a base fare of \$1.50, and the UberXL, low-cost rides for larger groups with a base fare of \$3.75. Fees include 18 cents per minute, \$1.45 per mile, a booking fee of \$1.20, a cancellation fee of \$5, and a minimum fare of \$6 for the UberX.

For Kristin and Brett Donadeo of Fayetteville, the Uber experience was pleasant. "We walked to the grocery store, then used the mobile app to ask for a ride," Kristin recalls. "Our driver picked us up in front of the grocery store. His car was very clean and nice inside. I love that you don't have to worry about having cash or a card with you because your payment is handled through the app with the card that you set up on your account. The app is very easy to use and I like that you can see where your driver is on a map. I would use Uber again for times when we don't have our one car or even to get to the airport."

Ridesharing options are increasing, and even Google is launching one – Waze. With the recent additional focus of safety for riders and drivers, as well as meeting new laws in various regions, Uber could be here to stay, or instead become known as a pioneer for a world of ridesharing even if Uber doesn't exist in the future.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.