The Overland Park Chamber of Commerce marks 1967 as its official birth year, but its foundation was laid years earlier by a group of businessmen meeting on Saturdays for breakfast to talk about what they wanted their community to be. They wanted good neighborhoods, schools and public services. To accomplish that, they knew they needed to build the city's tax base.

After focusing on projects such as a fall festival, holiday decorations and street cleaning, the businessmen got serious in 1966, launching a membership drive with the objective of hiring a full-time staff. With Stan Meyer, president of Rau Construction Company; and Leonard McKinzie, owner of United Super Market; chairing the membership committee, about 30 business leaders actively participated in the drive, which increased membership to 266 and dues income quadrupled to about $17,000 annually.

Richard L. “Dick” Molampy was hired as the Chamber’s first executive director and he started March 1, 1967, working from an office in the Glenwood Manor Motor Hotel at 92nd & Metcalf. His first project was to develop a program of work.
1968 — Mr. and Mrs. Ewing Kauffman, owners of the Kansas City Royals, Mayor Guard W. Enoch, and Chamber of Commerce President Ben Craig were assisted by former Kansas City Mayor H. Roe Bartle and Milgram’s executives at the official opening of the Milgram’s market in Louisburg Square Shopping Center.

1970s — Johnson County Community College campus construction under way.

1977
- College Boulevard opens

1978
- Deanna Rose Children’s Farmstead opens, May

1980
- Chamber publishes first membership directory

1982
- Chamber establishes the Convention & Visitors Bureau

1983
- Leadership Overland Park begins

1984
- Mary Birch promoted to Chamber president
based on suggestions from members. The first plan of work included these objectives:

1. Broaden the tax base by actively assisting in the promotion of available industrial sites and seeking the establishment of one or more industrial park areas;
2. Encourage and assist authorities in the improvement of transportation infrastructure.

This would include city, county, state and federal thoroughfares, Johnson County airport expansion, an expressway to MCI airport, and better mass transit;

3. Help make Overland Park a better place in which to live by working for development of a public recreation program and additional facilities;
4. Enhance the image and identification of the city as a distinguished place to live and work and buy goods and services. A dynamic voice of business, stating the Chamber’s position on issues affecting community growth, must be developed. Continued support of our superior school system is necessary. The establishment of a comprehensive Community Junior College and technical school must be


to the Chamber’s position on issues affecting community growth, must be developed. Continued support of our superior school system is necessary. The establishment of a comprehensive Community Junior College and technical school must be
supported. Medical facilities must be expanded. Meetings and conventions must be encouraged.

For Meyer, a major goal was to get Overland Park added to maps of Kansas. Meyer and the late Ben Craig, Metcalf Bank, were the Chamber’s top officials in 1967 and they served as the organization’s first and second volunteer board presidents (now known as Chairmen of the Board).

A symbiotic relationship with the City of Overland Park developed early in the Chamber’s existence. Together, the Chamber and the City worked to create a climate that attracts companies and enables them to prosper and grow.

As the City and the Chamber grew together, the Chamber focused on economic development, government relations, member services and long-term community development.

In its first year, the Chamber endorsed a $1.6 million recreation bond referendum that would build two municipal swimming pools and an 18-hole municipal golf course as well as purchase and develop neighborhood parks and additional land for the Indian Creek parkway system. In its first decade, the Chamber supported numerous bonds and proposals: a $101 million flood control project that would have included construction of three reservoirs (the bond did not pass); a bond issue for Johnson County Community College’s permanent campus facility; passage of liquor by the drink; construction of the Switzer Bypass to relieve traffic congestion; a countywide sales tax to ease financial difficulties of the Shawnee Mission School District; a gasoline tax to retire $30 million in bonds for road improvements including 111th Street (now College Boulevard) and Quivira Road leading to the proposed Oak Park Mall; and the original Johnson County Charter.

Wanting to ensure a highly educated populace that would attract major employers with highly paid jobs, the Chamber has been a staunch supporter of initiatives and tax policies that have helped create public schools consistently ranked among the best in the nation. The Chamber received the prestigious Valley Forge Award for developing a program to train social studies teachers to implement economics instruction in the classroom, one of the first large-scale efforts of its kind in the nation.

Recognizing the importance of nearby medical facilities, the Chamber supported expansion of Shawnee Mission Hospital and zoning for Humana Hospital (now Overland Park Regional Medical Center).

While the Chamber initially opposed a city-only half-cent sales tax, believing it should be county-wide to maintain competitiveness, the tax eventually passed and it began to move the city from largely a residential tax base to one shared more evenly with retail and commercial taxes.

As Overland Park grew to become the second largest city in the metropolitan region and in Kansas, planning for effective roads and highways became critical. The Chamber was always at the forefront in advocating for an infrastructure conducive to both businesses and residents. It pushed for critical projects we today take for granted including I-435 to

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**1999**
- Sprint dedicates new World Headquarters, October 1.

**2000**
- Chamber constructs Building 29 in Corporate Woods.

**2002**
- Overland Park Convention Center and Sheraton Overland Park opens.

**2004**
- Tracey Osborne, CCE, becomes Chamber president.

**2008**
- I-435 interchange at Antioch Road opens, November.
- Chamber earns 5-Star Reaccreditation, the highest rating available from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

**2009**
- Overland Park Soccer Complex opens, September.
- Johnson County voters approve 1/8-cent sales tax to create Johnson County Education Research Triangle, November.
MCI Airport, numerous Overland Park interchanges along I-435 and improvements to U.S. Highway 69.

With tremendous city growth in the 1960s and 70s, auto dealers, shopping centers and other service businesses appeared. In 1978, Molamphy hired Mary Birch to sell memberships to them. Three years later, Birch became assistant manager and then was promoted to Chamber president after Molamphy’s death in 1984. For two decades, Birch was synonymous with the Overland Park Chamber, expanding it into one of the most successful around and earning herself a nationwide reputation in the Chamber industry.

Through its numerous volunteer opportunities, the Chamber has helped mold leaders to serve the community. In 1983, the Chamber Foundation established the Leadership Overland Park program that has since graduated more than 800 participants who moved into roles including state legislature, City Council and school board.

A mammoth project in which the Chamber helped transform Overland Park’s landscape was the development of the “University of World Excellence,” – Sprint’s World Headquarters Campus of 17 buildings on 200 acres, which broke ground in 1996. This instantly made Sprint the largest employer in the community and brought related companies and new jobs to Overland Park.

In the late 1990s, the Chamber Foundation made the courageous move to commit to building the Chamber’s own office building in Corporate Woods. It raised more than $1.7 million to build a state-of-the-art building that gave the Chamber its own corporate identity and also provided the business community with resources such as community space to conduct small business meetings.

After 24 years with the Chamber, Birch left in 2002 (today she serves as government relations coordinator for Lathrop & Gage LLP). Two years later, the Chamber presidency was filled by Tracey Osborne, a Chamber industry veteran who continued Birch’s legacy of
positioning the Overland Park Chamber as a local and regional leader.

With the advent of the 21st century, the Chamber helped attract numerous large companies bringing thousands of new jobs to Overland Park. Some of these included Quintiles, J. P. Morgan Retirement Plan Services (now Empower Retirement) and Teva Pharmaceuticals. The Chamber also assisted with major expansions by companies including Black & Veatch and Netsmart Technologies.

Always important to the Chamber, public policy and advocacy efforts became even more crucial in the 2000s with waning support at the state level for important economic builders. The Chamber took a leading role in initiatives to provide funding for quality of life factors including public schools and transportation infrastructure. Some of these included supporting a 1/8-cent sales tax to create the Johnson County Education Research Triangle in 2008, creation of a Coalition of Local Chambers in 2010 that advocated for a balanced state budget approach that led to a temporary tax to fund schools and transportation, and its 2012 intervention in the Kansas Redistricting lawsuit seeking fair representation in the Kansas legislature that led to Johnson County gaining legislative seats. Through its partnership with the Johnson County Public Policy Council, the Chamber also helped encourage voter engagement with the development of the VoteJoCo website.

Faced with a difficult economy and shrinking state budget, the Chamber conducted a community scan of Johnson County voters and businesses in 2012 that affirmed the community’s long-standing priorities of funding quality of life factors such as education and transportation infrastructure through a balance of sales, income and property taxes.

Going into its fifth decade, the Overland Park Chamber continued to serve a city consistently recognized as one of the best in the nation and highly ranked for attributes including education, safety, technology, friendliness, entrepreneurship, job opportunities, recreational amenities and access to health care. Partnering with its members, both large and small, the Chamber engaged in activities to strengthen and enhance those quality of life contributors.

The Chamber’s work to enhance the business environment and quality of life in Overland Park was affirmed in both 2009 and 2014 when it earned 5-Star Reaccreditation, the highest rating available from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

As the Chamber hits its 50-year mark, we look back with gratitude to the many leaders and hundreds of companies who provided vision and support to develop the association into what it is today and will become in the next 50 years.
These companies have been members of the
Overland Park Chamber of Commerce since its founding:

- AT&T (formerly Southwestern Bell Telephone)
- Bear & Bear Associates
- Central Bank of the Midwest (formerly Metcalf State Bank)
- Family Tree Nursery (formerly Overland Park Garden Center)
- HNTB Corporation (formerly Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff)
- Kansas City Power & Light
- Kansas Gas Service
- McGilley & Hoge Johnson County Memorial Chapel
- Memorial Events of Johnson County (formerly Newcomer’s Overland Park Chapel & Cemetery)
- MetroMedia, Inc. (formerly Sun Publications)
- Mize, Houser & Company
- O’Neill Automotive
- Payne & Jones, Chartered
- Rau Construction Company
- Security Bank of Kansas City (formerly Valley View Bank)
- Shafer, Kline & Warren, Inc.
- Suburban Lawn & Garden
- UMB Bank n.a. (formerly Overland Park State Bank & Trust)
- Wallace Saunders (formerly Wallace, Saunders, Austin, Brown & Enochs)