Chamber promotes Overland Park as corporate community

The business leaders who established the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce fifty years ago wanted Overland Park to not be just a bedroom community of commuters. They worked to transform Overland Park into a corporate center with plenty of employment opportunities. They supported facilities providing greater access to health care, and encouraged development that generated increased sales and tourism taxes paid by corporate and leisure visitors, which helped reduce the amount of taxes paid by local residents.

A Corporate Center
Within a year of the Chamber’s founding in 1967, it partnered with the City of Overland Park to produce a brochure to recruit companies. Excellent schools and distinctive residential developments were increasing Overland Park’s population and many of the executives who called it home liked the idea of locating their companies here, too. With ample parking, highway access, and a family-oriented lifestyle, Overland Park soon became a thriving corporate center that also spurred retail growth.

1967 – The opening of Metcalf South Shopping Center made Overland Park a retail leader, drawing shoppers from a large region. The developer envisioned a “full-range of stores, restaurants, playgrounds, and parks,” where “people shop, work, relax, meet, and have fun . . . attend meetings, inspect scientific or cultural exhibits, and maybe even dance.”

1974 – When Oak Park Mall opened, it became the largest mall in the Kansas City metropolitan area and the entire state of Kansas.

1975 – Buildings 20-24 opened in Corporate Woods, which had been conceived by partners Tom Congleton, Russ Jones, Whitney Kerr, Sr., and Richard “Dick” Wagstaff. As it developed, the office park grew to offer some of the most prestigious office space in the Kansas City metro.

1976 – With Black & Veatch doubling in size between 1971 and 1976, the company completed a six-story headquarters that was the largest office building in Kansas. By 2009, as one of Overland Park’s largest employers, the company affirmed its commitment to the community by purchasing its headquarters building and embarking on a $60 million renovation and expansion that culminated with the dedication of the Rodman Innovation Pavilion in 2014.

1989 – The Overland Park Chamber Economic Development Council was established as a partnership of private investors, the City of Overland Park and the Chamber of Commerce to attract new businesses as well as expand and retain existing businesses.

1999 – The largest development in Overland Park’s history was celebrated with the dedication of Sprint World Headquarters, a campus of 18 office buildings that initially consolidated more than 14,500 employees at one location. In addition to saving the company the cost of leasing more than 60 office buildings across the metro area, a goal of the consolidation was to enhance productivity by facilitating more frequent face-to-face interaction, less travel time and greater synergy among departments.

2008 – After years of resisting granting development subsidies, the City of Overland Park approved its first tax increment financing (TIF) for redevelopment of the nearly 50-year-old Cherokee South Plaza at 95th Street and Antioch Road. After completion of the project, it was estimated sales tax collections at the property would increase 400%.

2008 – The development of Corbin Park on 135th Street coincided with the devastating economic downturn of 2008. Two original tenants, JCPenney and Von Maur, withstood the recession and eventually were joined by dozens of other retail and professional services tenants including Scheels in 2015.

2014 – PrairieFire faced the same challenge as its neighbor on 135th Street, Corbin Park, when the recession stalled the mixed-used development. But Merrill Companies persevered and opened with a number of first-to-market retail and entertainment offerings and the unique Museum at PrairieFire.

2014 – The groundbreaking for CityPlace jumpstarted development of one of the last large tracts of farmland along College Boulevard. The 90-acre mixed-used develop-
ment by Block Real Estate Services will feature office buildings, 1,382 multi-family units, retail space on six acres and 140 senior living units.

2017 – For the first time in Overland Park’s history, a building was imploded, bringing down the ten-story former CenturyLink building. The demolition clears the way for a new office development scheduled to open in 2018.

Health Care
When the Chamber was established in 1967, the only hospital serving Overland Park was Shawnee Mission Medical Center, founded five years earlier. Among the directives determined during a series of “Day of Decision” membership meetings held in the first year was that “Medical facilities must be expanded.”

1978 – After breaking ground in 1976, Humana opened Suburban Medical Center as the first hospital in Overland Park. Today we know it as Overland Park Regional Medical Center.

1996 – Menorah Medical Center moved to its present Overland Park campus 65 years after opening its first hospital in Kansas City, Mo., in 1931.

1997 – Children’s Mercy Hospital opens Children’s Mercy South in Overland Park.


Tourism
Chamber leaders took to heart one of the directives from their series of “Day of Decision” meetings in early

1967 – “Meetings and conventions must be encouraged.” By July they had formed a committee for conventions, meetings and tourism and the next month announced a promotional brochure was in the works to stimulate convention and meeting interest in Overland Park.

1982 – The opening of the DoubleTree Hotel took the hospitality industry in Overland Park to a new level and approval of a transient guest tax enabled the Chamber and the City to focus on tourism as an economic development catalyst.


1984 – The Marriott Overland Park Hotel adds nearly 400 more hotel rooms.

1987 – The Overland Park Convention & Visitors Bureau (now Visit OP) becomes a separate entity.

2002 – After more than 15 years of efforts by the Chamber, City and Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Overland Park Convention Center and the Sheraton Overland Park Hotel open, giving Overland Park the ability to host regional, state and national events.

2009 – The opening of the Scheels Overland Park Soccer Complex – the only one of its kind in the country – helped cement Overland Park’s status as a top destination for youth sports, which bring considerable tax revenue to the community.

If you have historic photos related to the Overland Park business community, we’d like to make copies. Please contact Stan at slawson@opchamber.org.