Overland Park’s major developments in the past 50 years

When the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1967, its leaders determined that priorities to shape a successful community must include well-funded public schools, well-designed infrastructure for transportation and public safety, building an environment attractive to corporate and retail development, access to quality health care, and advocacy efforts to keep elected officials aware of policy supportive of economic growth. Pursuing these priorities over the past 50 years has helped Overland Park grow into a city that is consistently ranked among the best in the nation.

This month we present historical timelines that highlight significant accomplishments in education, transportation and advocacy that helped transform Overland Park into the community we know today:

Education
From the very beginning, our leaders believed a commitment to quality education was the foundation on which a prosperous community was built.

1969 - Academic excellence in Johnson County was firmly established with the formation of Shawnee Mission School District, which quickly grew to be one of the largest and highest performing districts in the state.

1972 - One of the first initiatives supported by the Chamber was the establishment of Johnson County Community College, which happened after a successful county-wide election in March 1967. Two years later, Johnson County voters approved $12.9 million in bonds to purchase land in Overland Park and the campus opened in the fall of 1972.

1975 - As the population in southern Johnson County swelled, Blue Valley School District was established. Enrollment nearly quadrupled in the district’s first 10 years.

1993 - The University of Kansas expanded its presence in Johnson County by opening its Edwards Campus in Overland Park on land donated by real estate developer Clay Blair III, who requested the campus be named for KU alumni Roy and Joan Edwards.

2008 - After Johnson County voters approved a one-eighth cent sales tax to create the Johnson County Education Research Triangle, the KU Edwards Campus gained the 75,000-square-foot, $25 million Business, Engineering, Science and Technology (BEST) Building. This initiative also boosted the International Animal Health and Food Safety Institute at K-State’s Innovation Campus in Olathe and The University of Kansas Clinic Research Center in Fairway. The Research Triangle was estimated to generate a local economic impact of well over $1.4 billion and attract millions of dollars in private and public donations and research grants.

Transportation
Overland Park residents enjoy a relatively short work commute thanks to the planning and foresight of early leaders who began in the mid-1960s development of Interstate 435. The first segment of I-435 opened in 1965 between I-35 and Metcalf Avenue and it was fully built through Overland Park by 1969. Chamber leaders pushed for interchanges in Overland Park that facilitated access to Johnson County Community College and Overland Park Regional Medical Center at Quivira Road and Corporate Woods at Antioch Road.

1975 - The opening of the Overland Parkway (also known as the Switzer Bypass) helped facilitate I-69 traffic through Overland Park and helped reroute industrial and through traffic away from Metcalf Avenue.

1977 - 111th Street was widened to four lanes and renamed College Boulevard because it was a major artery to Johnson County Community College.

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Major developments cont. . .

1987 – I-435 Interchange at Quivira Road opened.
2008 – I-435 Interchange at Antioch Road opened.

Advocacy & Issues

Through solid, long-standing relationships with policy-makers at the local, state and federal levels, the Overland Park Chamber has always been a respected voice representing its business members.

1967 – The Chamber endorsed a $1.6 million recreation bond referendum for two municipal swimming pools and a municipal golf course as well as to purchase and develop parks and additional land for the Indian Creek parkway system.

1968 – Kansas Highway Department representatives met with Chamber leaders to discuss future projects and the Chamber’s committee members suggested the division should place more emphasis on areas of heaviest gas tax contributions and expanding population.

1976 – The Chamber endorsed the proposed Johnson County Charter and called for defeat of the Kansas constitutional amendment on land use appraisal that would shift the tax burden from rural areas to urban areas.

1983 – The Chamber Foundation established the Leadership Overland Park program as a way to educate future leaders about the needs, issues and priorities of our community. Since then, the program has graduated more than 800 participants who moved into leadership roles with entities including the state legislature, City Council and school board.

1987 – After a nearly ten-year legislative effort by the Chamber, a bill allowing liquor by the drink in restaurants is passed.

1993 – After years of relying on the Chamber president and volunteers to travel back and forth to Topeka, the Chamber hired its first full-time government affairs staff to lobby in Topeka.

2003 – The Chamber helped promote the successful city election that extended a one-eighth cent sales tax to construct new neighborhood streets and make thoroughfare improvements.

2008 – The Chamber supported the City of Overland Park’s annexation of land in southern Johnson County.

2012 – The Chamber conducted a community scan of Johnson County voters and businesses that affirmed the community’s long-standing priorities of funding quality of life factors such as education and infrastructure through a balance of sales, income and property taxes.

2012 – The Chamber, through Ben Craig and Larry Winn, filed a Kansas Redistricting lawsuit seeking fair representation in the Kansas legislature that led to Johnson County gaining legislative seats.

In next month’s newsletter, we’ll present timelines that highlight other community assets that have contributed to Overland Park’s phenomenal growth over the past 50 years. If you have historic photos related to the Overland Park business community, we’d like to make borrow them to make copies. Please contact Stan at slawson@opchamber.org.