FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Mission Accomplished

I love history, particularly history that connects people and places I love. I’ve always enjoyed the stories our Chamber’s founders have shared with me about Overland Park’s early days. One particularly resonates with me, perhaps because Stan Meyer (then Winn Rau Corporation, now Rau Construction) tells it with such passion. Stan was our founding President (now they’re called Chairmen of the Board) and he, along with Ben Craig, Leonard McKinzie, and many others, were working hard in 1966-67 to recruit members and raise the funds to re-organize the Chamber as a professional, business organization.

It was Stan’s job to energize the troops and set the course for the members and the business community. As he’s told me on several occasions, one of the things that really made him crazy was that Overland Park wasn’t on the map. He meant not just figuratively, but also in the most literal sense. A local newspaper reported in June 1967 that while Overland Park was the fourth largest city in Kansas at a population of 62,000, we didn’t merit mention on most maps, including the World Book Atlas of 1965 which showed Lenexa, DeSoto, Olathe, Stanley and Leawood. Rand McNally of Kansas denoted Wichita, Kansas City and Topeka as the three largest metro areas but lumped Overland Park in as “one of the suburban satellites” of Kansas City, Kansas.

This really rankled Stan, who told The Overland Squire, “Overland Park never had much identity. It needs to start acting like a first class city. We should have an effective Chamber of Commerce. We are no longer just a small town.”

Indeed. Ben Craig, our Chamber’s co-founder and then President of Metcalf State Bank and VP of the Chamber, told The Kansas City Times in May 1967, “There are some cities in Johnson County that are satisfied with being considered bedroom communities. However, we in Overland Park feel we are more than that. We are on our way to being a well-balanced community of residential, commercial, and hopefully, industrial development.” The Chamber at that time was on a roll, energizing the business community to dream big of the day when we would be not just ON all the maps of Kansas, but on the lists of the top places to live and locate thriving businesses.

Stan and the charter Board of Directors set forth a plan of action that included hiring Dick Molamphy, our first professional executive as well as four goals that would encourage orderly growth in the city. They were:

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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 facilities – this included thoroughfares, the Johnson County airport expansion, the expressway to MCI and better public transportation

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. Develop a dynamic voice of business; support our superior schools and establish a comprehensive Community Junior College and technical school; expand medical facilities and encourage meetings and conventions.

Sound familiar? These type of goals have been the bedrock of quality of life and economic development since our founding. Just as they successfully led Stan to recruit legions of new members through “Days of Decision” meetings in 1967, these same principles have guided subsequent board leaders and professional staff teams to advocate for infrastructure and public policy that provides for the quality of life that has created the environment of prosperity we enjoy today, 50 years after our founding.

We’re on all the maps now. Mission Accomplished. Thanks, Stan.