Look inside new courthouse

Latest news on measures to slow spread of COVID-19
There really is no way to look back at 2020 without observing this has been a year like no other. We mourn the county residents who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and have their loved ones in our minds and hearts. We feel for the residents and businesses impacted negatively by the pandemic in a multitude of ways. We applaud the frontline workers who have treated the sick, worked to mitigate the spread or innovated ways for our students to continue to learn.

This has been a year of collaboration with cities, school districts, hospitals and other important partners in the region, county and state. While this has been a difficult year, a lack of cooperation and partnership would have put us in a much worse position. Our organization and our community have pulled together to fight COVID-19 and will continue to do so as the calendar turns to 2021.

2020 will also be remembered for the killing of George Floyd and other black people in our country, followed by reaction ranging from peaceful protests to civil unrest. As we head into a new year we hope you join us in working towards peace, acceptance and understanding.

There were bright moments and achievements in 2020. In this issue we give you a Top Ten list of actions our Board took this year on behalf of our residents. We also update you on an exciting economic development opportunity that will create new jobs and new revenue at New Century AirCenter.

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We look towards 2021 with anticipation. Efforts such as the next Johnson County Charter review and Citizens Visioning Committee will bring together community members who will focus on our future. Let’s all work together to continue to make Johnson County a place where people want to live, work and raise a family.

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Ways to engage with JoCo

Online
Visit jocogov.org to:
• Find your county commissioner
• Get answers to questions
• Learn about more than 400 services that Johnson County provides

Social media
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: @jocogov

By phone
Call Center: 913-715-5000
Kansas Relay Operator: 800-766-3777

Board of County Commissioners’ meetings:
Attend a board meeting weekly at 9:30 a.m. Thursdays on the third floor of the Administration Building, 111 S. Cherry St., in Olathe or watch online at boccmeetings.jocogov.org.

Johnson County Elected Officials
Ed Eilert, Chairman
Becky Fast, 1st District
Jim Allen, 2nd District
Steve Klika, 3rd District
Janeé Hanzlick, 4th District
Michael Ashcraft, 5th District
Mike Brown, 6th District
Steve Howe, district attorney
Calvin Hayden, sheriff

Pictured above: From advance voting to Election Day to the vote canvass, the 2020 general election is in the books and could not have gone much smoother. In all, 350,750 votes were cast in Johnson County, a 77.48% voter turnout. On an interesting note, the Board of County Canvassers (based on statutory authority) flipped a coin to decide the outcome of two tied write-in races, the Oxford Township Treasurer and the Gardner Township Treasurer. The Canvassers certified the election results on Nov. 12. Please check out our back cover for more information about the general election.
Two departments change names

Johnson County is making changes to enhance the visibility of the county’s Aging Services program. In September, the Board of County Commissioners approved transferring the Housing Services and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Administration divisions from the Human Services Department to the Planning, Development and Codes Department, now known as Planning, Housing and Community Development.

The BOCC also approved renaming the Department of Human Services to the Department of Aging and Human Services. Aging Services (including Nutrition Services) and Outreach and Accessibility Services will remain within the department and will be the focus of that department’s work.

Moving Housing Services and CDBG to Planning, Housing and Community Development provides a direct link to Transit, which also resides in this department, consolidates inspection staff and leverages the experience in the Planning Department for implementing housing programs.

Board urges safe use and discharge of firearms in unincorporated Johnson County

The Board of County Commissioners made an official statement on Sept. 3, urging and promoting the safe and responsible use and discharge of firearms in the unincorporated area of Johnson County.

The board made the statement in response to increasing formal and informal reports of damage from the discharge of stray bullets in the unincorporated area of the county, including reports of stray bullets striking homes, structures and, in at least one case, a moving vehicle.

In part, the statement read, “The Board urges gun owners and users to learn and practice gun safety at all times. Before discharging, be aware of your surroundings, know your target and always keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction. Use an appropriate backstop that meets or exceeds safety recommendations and standards for the surroundings and the firearms being used.”
Don’t forget to sign up for winter programs and activities!

Jan. - April 2021

JCPRD offers programs and events for all ages, from early childhood to 50 Plus, including: aquatics, arts, history, fitness, gymnastics, nature, special interests, special populations, sports, travel, and more!

Also, help us celebrate fifty years of 50 Plus programming in 2021.

JCPRD.com/activities
Twenty years in the making: A sneak peek into Johnson County’s new home for justice

BY LORI SAND

The final step to turn the dream of a new courthouse into reality took place on Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2016, when Johnson County voters approved a 10-year, quarter-cent public safety sales tax to fund a new county courthouse and coroner facility. For two decades prior to the successful vote, county leadership studied courthouse options with recommendations for a new courthouse from numerous consultants, professional staff and citizen advisory groups.

Nearly ready for business, the 356,821 square foot, seven story courthouse includes 28 courtrooms and the District Attorney’s office within the tower and a north parking lot. The project cost is $193 million. The Design Build delivery method was awarded to JE Dunn Construction with a team consisting of local architect TreanorHL and Fentress Architects out of Denver, Colorado.

“The new Johnson County Courthouse is an anchor in downtown Olathe, north of the future Johnson County Square and the other buildings that flank it; Johnson County Detention Center, the County Administration building and Olathe City Hall. The landmark will serve the county and its taxpayers as an instrument of justice and service for the next 75 years or more.”

Chairman Ed Eilert, Johnson County Board of County Commissioners

“One of several concerns addressed by the new construction is secure in-custody circulation; separating inmates and criminal defendants from victims, witnesses, jurors, public and staff.”

Sheriff Calvin Hayden, Johnson County Sheriff’s Office

“The new courthouse is more than 120,000 square feet larger than the existing courthouse. Not only does this allow for future growth, it also permits greater physical distancing in all areas of the building.”

Brad Reinhardt, director of Facilities

The mechanical system has improved filtration of outdoor air which supplies occupants with clean, fresh air throughout the day. These considerations all make safe building operations possible, even in a pandemic.

Photo credit: Dan Wehmueller

TIMELINE

November 2017
Design Build team notice to proceed.

July 12, 2018
Groundbreaking Ceremony at 150 W. Santa Fe St.

February – April 2019
The inmate tunnel is excavated under Santa Fe.

August 2019
The county holds a Topping Out Ceremony, placing the final beam at the north stair tower.

Winter 2020
The courthouse was designed to be publicly accessible to visitors through a variety of integrated features. This includes; ADA parking, drop off zones, multiple accessible public entries, accessible automatic doors, universally accessible height reception counters throughout, and wheelchair accommodations in the courtrooms, including ramps to the witness stand and judge’s bench.

The witness and attorney monitors allow for interactive display whereby one can illustrate for all to see. The attorney podium which houses much of this technology is also fully accessible, as is the judge’s bench. Bench features include a unique electric sit/stand worksurface.

The south Civic Plaza and water feature create a tranquil gathering space.

“The design of the courtrooms and state-of-the-art technology allow for litigants, attorneys, jurors and judicial staff to efficiently carry out true access to justice in a secure and efficient setting.”

Joe Waters, assistant county manager

“The new public service-oriented courthouse offers visitors the Emporium of Justice, which locates several of the most used functions directly off the lobby for convenience. These high traffic areas include jury assembly, court clerk, self-help center, high volume courts and hearing rooms.”

Penny Postoak Ferguson, county manager

“Open Prairie” public art is installed.

July 2020

26 months from start of construction, Substantial Completion is reached.

August 2020

Staff moves occur.

November - December 2020

Opens to the public.

January 4, 2021

The building envelope is deemed weather tight with interior work commencing.

November 2019

All photos credit Bill Timmerman except where noted.

Chief Judge Thomas Kelly Ryan, Division 17 of the 10th Judicial District of Kansas

“...The soaring, unique modern architecture cements this building as an icon in downtown Olathe and plays a role in revitalizing the area.”

Joe Waters, assistant county manager

Chief Judge Thomas Kelly Ryan, Division 17 of the 10th Judicial District of Kansas

All photos credit Bill Timmerman except where noted.
As you walk toward the main entrance to the lobby, you will encounter the new Johnson County Courthouse’s public art piece titled “Open Prairie,” visible from Santa Fe Street. The artist Benjamin Ball was inspired by the American Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton whose work is characterized by vibrant colors, fluid lines and midwestern themes and landscapes.

Based on a catenary curve, the art installation is a dynamic sculpture dramatically suspended 23 feet from the ceiling, composed of 5,400 baked enamel stainless-steel ball chains each hung by hand from an anodized aluminum crest. It is accentuated by an integrated skylight and accent lighting. The view skyward is of a vapor-like visual composition that changes as one moves around it, observing from various vantage points.

The lobby is majestically graced by the historic 1892 statue, Goddess of Justice.

This statue of the Greek goddess Themis, the symbol of justice, first stood on the roof of the south entrance of Johnson County’s 1892 courthouse. The statue was placed on display in the 1952 Johnson County courthouse in 1997 where it stood ever since.

“Let us join in the hope that the Goddess of Justice, as she stands serenely over the portal of this consecrated structure, with the scales of justice evenly balanced in her hand, may prove to be prophetic and emblematical of the justice and equity and purity of the judgments to be rendered.”

Judge John T. Burris at August 18, 1892 courthouse dedication

Photo credit: Dan Wehmueller
What makes a tree a champion?

BY GERALD HAY

Everyone likes to root for a champion in Johnson County. And when that champion is rooted firmly in the ground, it’s a win-win situation.

Johnson County currently has 26 tree-mendous champs. They are among the 168 Champion Trees of Kansas on the 2020 list. The program, dating back to the early 1960s, is managed by the Kansas Forest Service at Kansas State University.

Kansas Champion Trees are the super-sized, superstars of their species. They come in many sizes.

“The program helps showcase the importance of trees to the environment in a fun way. It also shows the diversity of trees throughout the state of Kansas,” said Dennis Patton, horticulturist at the Johnson County K-State Research and Extension Office. “We do not think of Kansas as having trees – it is a prairie state, but forests are important to the health of the environment.”

A Kansas Champion Tree is determined by a point system that includes height, crown spread and trunk size. Circumference is the most important factor, followed by height and crown spread.

According to Patton, the 26 Champion Trees in Johnson County are in backyards, city parks, golf courses, churches and cemeteries. The trees include five species of pine, two species of oak along with species of ash, cherry, birch, elm, hazelnut, hemlock, magnolia, maple, soapberry and sweetgum.

Olathe has the most local Champion Trees with seven. There was an 8th one until the release of the 2020 list. An Osage orange tree, standing 76 feet from the ground, was named the largest of its species before and during construction of the new courthouse in downtown Olathe, but had its champion status uprooted by another Osage orange in Emporia as the new courthouse prepares to open in January.

“Unfortunately, our Osage orange has been dethroned. The Olathe tree is taller, but the Emporia tree had a wider crown spread and bigger circumference, thus more points on the scale,” Patton said.

The Olathe tree was spared four years ago in development of the construction site for the new courthouse and incorporated into the project’s northern parking lot.

The age of the Osage orange tree at the new courthouse remains only an estimate. It’s believed the tree was a sapling when Johnson County was a toddler.

“We think it’s been around as long as Olathe and Johnson County have been around,” Patton said with a smile. Olathe was founded in 1857. The county was created two years before the city.

The other 19 Champion Trees in Johnson County are in nine cities. Five trees are in Prairie Village. Leawood and Overland Park each have three. Mission Hills and Shawnee each have two apiece. Stilwell, Westwood, Mission and De Soto each have one Champion Tree.

The program does not present plaques or signage in recognition of Kansas Champion Trees. The 2020 list of Champion Trees is available at: kansasforests.org/kansas_forest_services/championtrees.html. 🌳
Protecting domestic violence survivors in a pandemic

BY WILL HURST

2020 brought an unprecedented amount of stress on the entire globe, including Johnson County. As local communities dealt with shelter-in-place orders, school closings and economic issues, experts were concerned about ensuring that survivors of domestic violence receive essential services for themselves and their families.

In Johnson County, many of those services are provided by Safehome and the Johnson County District Attorney’s Office. Active since 1979, Safehome is the only domestic violence shelter in Johnson County. In addition to providing a 24-hour Crisis Hotline and shelter for survivors and families, Safehome provides counseling, safety planning, community education and legal services.

“We are essential workers and we’ve remained open,” said Safehome CEO Heidi Wooten. “Finding innovative solutions for survivors during a pandemic was not a choice.”

The Johnson County District Attorney’s Office provides services in collaboration with and in addition to those provided by Safehome. In 2019, the office filed more than 1,700 criminal cases involving domestic violence. The victim in every domestic violence case is assigned an advocate who provides support, education and assistance during the case. In addition to its criminal caseload, the office’s Victim Assistance Unit — which includes two full-time Safehome employees — assists more than 1,000 individuals each year who need assistance in obtaining a protection from abuse or stalking order.

Safehome and the District Attorney’s Office require the commitment and effort of local law enforcement agencies to help domestic violence survivors.

“The innovative collaboration that Safehome has with the District Attorney’s Office, law enforcement, and community hospitals is truly unique,” said Wooten. “Very few agencies across the country have the type of united relationship that we have. All of us working together has created an effective trifecta for making services trauma-informed and accessible to victims.”

Such commitment and teamwork have continued despite the pandemic.

“We knew that it was essential for us to stay open for business,” said Steve Howe, Johnson County District Attorney. “Our office focused on finding new and innovated ways to ensure we could reach victims while keeping both our staff and victims safe.”

One such change was made for those seeking protection from abuse or stalking orders. Previously, when an individual sought assistance in obtaining a protection from abuse or stalking order, he or she would be required to come spend hours at the courthouse, filling out paperwork and meeting face to face with various staff. With assistance from several Johnson County partners, the process has now transitioned to a digital system which is quicker, more convenient, and safer.

Safehome also took steps to safely provide shelter to survivors and families in need. In person counseling and support groups transitioned to virtual meetings. Safehome’s Domestic Violence Hotline (913-262-2868) remained staffed 24 hours a day. Safehome representatives respond day or night to any Johnson County hospital when a patient indicates they are a victim of domestic violence.

“Safehome has always been so driven to help those in need,” said Will Hurst, assistant Johnson County district attorney and head of the Domestic Violence Unit. “They have continued their mission during these difficult times.”

As the New Year approaches, much of the uncertainty that had defined 2020 still lingers. Despite the challenges, Safehome and the District Attorney’s Office remained committed to a future where violence is not tolerated, offenders are held accountable, and survivors receive the assistance they need for a safe and bright future.
COVID-19 digest: Fall 2020 milestones

BY THERESA FREED

After several months of fairly consistent numbers of new cases a day, Johnson County and the rest of the metro experienced a surge of COVID-19 this fall. In addition to issuing a public health order (page 4), Johnson County continued to fight COVID-19 on several fronts as we approached colder weather, holiday gatherings and the flu season.

Mask mandate continues
This fall, the State Finance Council approved several of Governor Laura Kelly’s requests to extend her state of disaster declaration 30 days at a time. The declaration is tied to her executive order requiring Kansans to wear face masks in public settings. Johnson County was one of a handful of counties across Kansas to affirm the Governor’s mask mandate. As long as the Governor’s state of disaster declaration is in place, the mask mandate in Johnson County will remain in effect, unless rescinded by the Governor or the Board of County Commissioners votes to opt out of the mandate.

“We support the science — masks work,” said Chairman Ed Eilert. “We look forward to a time when we no longer need them, but as long as there’s a high level of community spread, masks are an easy and effective way to protect each other.”

Getting children back in schools — with precautions
Johnson County Department of Health and Environment has remained engaged with Johnson County school superintendents. In coordination with the schools, the county released recommendations for reopening buildings to staff, faculty and students. It developed gating criteria to help families and others make informed decisions about returning to the classroom. Some districts have opted for hybrid learning (a mix of remote and in-class learning), while others have offered families other options.

Another effort to assist schools with promoting a safer in-class setting – expanded testing. The county invested in saliva testing for school health care to administer, with parental permissions, to gauge the level of transmission in the school.

“The partnership between school districts and the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment has been invaluable in helping school districts make informed decisions about returning to the classroom,” said Olathe School District superintendent John Allison. “JCDHE’s expertise and guidance has and will continue to allow boards of education to make science-based decisions on safely opening schools for both students and staff.”

Improved dashboard
In October, JCDHE unveiled a new and improved dashboard. One of the primary features is a “Schools” tab that makes it easier to understand the gating criteria and important factors — such as positivity rate and the new incidents rate detail — that determine which category the districts are in. The new dashboard also includes information on how various data points are calculated.

Mental health is public health
The pandemic has taken a toll on many who struggle with anxiety and depression, but it’s also created feelings of isolation and uncertainty for others.

The Johnson County Mental Health Center has stepped up its response to those in need. JCMHC Director Tim DeWeese says we must care for our mental health while following all public health guidelines. And JCDHE director Dr. Sanmi Areola couldn’t agree more. In October, the two directors teamed up to tell the community — mental health and public health are not competing priorities — they go hand-in-hand. You can listen to the directors discuss the topic on a recent JoCo on the Go podcast. Access the recording at jocogov.org/podcast.

Expanded contract tracing, disease investigation and testing
Identifying how someone contracted COVID-19 is important to stopping the spread of the disease, as is knowing who may have been exposed, so appropriate quarantine and isolation measures can be initiated.

In the fall, the BOCC authorized the use of Coronavirus Relief Fund dollars and CARES Act funding to expand contact tracing and disease investigation efforts. When COVID-19 began, there were approximately five people assigned to this work, but they became overwhelmed with cases, so many, that some JCDHE staff put aside their normal duties and were trained on case investigations and disease investigation. As cases increased, so did the workload. Additional resources were requested and received from the Board of County Commissioners. Over time, JCDHE was able to add 11 contact tracers and 35 case investigators.

A flu vaccine is vital in the fight against COVID-19
Due to COVID-19, this year it is more important than ever to get vaccinated for flu. It will reduce your risk of getting sick, being hospitalized or even dying from flu. Flu vaccines will not prevent COVID-19, but they will reduce the burden of flu illnesses on the health care system.

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) urges everyone 6 months and older to get a seasonal flu shot. Flu shots are widely available at doctors’ offices, pharmacies, urgent care clinics and the health department. Make sure to wear a mask, stay 6 feet or more from other people and wash or sanitize your hands after touching surfaces. For more information, call 913-826-1261 or visit jocogov.org/flu.
Mark your Calendar

Here is just a sample of some of the Johnson County events you can enjoy this winter and early spring. You can find more at [jocogov.org](http://jocogov.org).

### January 2021

**Friday, Jan. 1 and Monday, Jan. 21**
County offices are closed for New Year's Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

**Saturday, Jan. 2**
“Common Threads,” an exhibit of quilts from the Johnson County Museum, runs through Jan. 23.

**Tuesday, Jan. 5**
Mental Health Connection Group
An open Zoom room for mental health connection and support from Dec. 8 through Jan 14. There is no cost to participate. Contact [jcmhevents@jocogov.org](mailto:jcmhevents@jocogov.org) to register. The group is available Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3 to 4 p.m. See [jocogov.org/mentalhealthevents](http://jocogov.org/mentalhealthevents) for more information.

**Friday, Jan. 29**
Celebrate Kansas Day! Learn about the state’s history at [kshs.org](http://kshs.org)

### February 2021

**Tuesdays, Feb. 2, 9, 16**
Retirement Planning Today
6:30 p.m. at K-State Extension Office, 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Olathe

**Friday, Feb. 5**
Adult Mental Health First Aid Virtual Training
9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register: email [jcmhevents@jocogov.org](mailto:jcmhevents@jocogov.org) or call 913-715-7880. The registration for these events is $25, which is reduced thanks to funding from Johnson County Department of Health and Environment. Events held throughout January – March. See [jocogov.org/mentalhealthevents](http://jocogov.org/mentalhealthevents) for more information.

**Thursday, Feb. 18**
Beyond Adult Cooking Class — Salmon
Time TBD, call 913-715-7000 for more details. K-State Extension Office, 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Olathe
### March 2021

**Thursday, Mar. 18**
Visit the Johnson County Museum for free during spring break! Explore KidScape and our signature exhibition, “Becoming Johnson County.” Museum hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, Mar. 23**
Hankie and Heirloom Linen Quilt Workshop  
6 p.m. at K-State Extension Office,  
11811 S. Sunset Drive, Olathe

**Saturday, Mar. 27**
Kids in the Kitchen — Italian  
6 p.m. at K-State Extension Office,  
11811 S. Sunset Drive, Olathe

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**Escape from Lanesfield School House**
Solve the mystery of the missing schoolmarm at this new escape-room style adventure! Book your experience today by visiting the Lanesfield Historic Site page on jcprd.com. This experience is best for ages 10 and older. Someone in the party must be 18 or older. This program is at the Lanesfield Historic Site. Call to register your group: 913-715-2570.

Begin in the Visitor Center with a costumed schoolteacher and head off to an actual 1904 schoolhouse to solve the mystery. You will learn about the local history of Lanesfield along the way.

The limestone schoolhouse, the last remaining structure in the former town of Lanesfield, is the oldest operating schoolhouse in Johnson County. Students attended from 1869 – 1963 when the school closed. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988. The site today includes the original schoolhouse, four outbuildings, and a modern Visitors Center that houses the exhibit “One-Room Schools in Kansas,” a museum store and restrooms.

The site also features seven interpretive panels on the grounds that tell the story of the schoolhouse, the town of Lanesfield and its connection with General and U.S. Senator James H. Lane, the reasons for the town’s eventual decline, Santa Fe Trail history, stories of the local Border War, and the agricultural experience in Johnson County.

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**New exhibit at Arts & Heritage Center calls artists to reflect on impact of COVID-19**
For a new exhibit at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center called “Resilience, Reflection, Rebuilding: Artists Respond to Covid-19,” local artists were asked to create a reflection of their experiences and feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic and to consider the pandemic as a catalyst for change.

The exhibit is on view and free to the public in the Creative Commons area at the Arts & Heritage Center and is also available to view online from the jcprd.com page through Jan. 22.

“The arts have the remarkable ability to create a sense of togetherness, belonging and community,” said Fine Arts Coordinator Devin Graham. “They can help decrease stress, loneliness and anxiety. They can provide opportunities to reflect, process experiences and feelings, imagine what our future might look like, and connect us through our common humanity.”

**A Never-Ending Battle**
by Adrian Marsh
COVID-19 won’t take a holiday break
Recently the CDC announced that COVID-19 can sometimes be spread by airborne transmission in addition to respiratory droplets. Wearing a mask, washing hands frequently and staying 6 feet or more from others you don’t live with will continue to be necessary through the coming months. The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment urges everyone to continue COVID-19 prevention measures and plan for safer ways to celebrate this holiday season: Stay local. Travel increases the chance of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. Keep gatherings small. Wave or verbally greet visitors instead of hugging or shaking hands. Have a small dinner or celebration outdoors or in a well-ventilated area with only the people who live in your household. Remind people who are sick, those who have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 or anyone waiting on a COVID-19 test result to stay home. Shop online. If that’s not possible, shop during less crowded times, such as early morning or later in the evening. Connect electronically. Video chat with family and friends, watch sports events, parades and movies from home. Get a flu shot this year! It may prevent you from getting the flu or getting seriously ill from the flu.

Prepare your mental health for winter
Outdoor opportunities to gather safely decrease along with the temperatures. There are some simple things you can do to position yourself for good mental health this winter. Plug in to mental health resources. Find social media accounts to follow, podcasts to listen to, YouTube videos to watch and classes to take that can help you be mindful of mental health both for yourself and people you care about. Do regular check-ins with yourself. You can ask yourself questions like “Are my practices in good balance – not too little or too much of anything?” “How are my emotions? Am I constantly worrying about the past or future, or am I grounded in the present?” and “What do I need right now?” Then, make shifts in your routine to help respond to your reflections. Make sure your house is safe. Work to create an environment where people can talk openly about what they are feeling without fear of judgment. Also, make sure any alcohol, medications and firearms are securely stored. Ask for help when you need it. If your emotions are impacting your ability to work, go to school or interact with others, it’s a good time to call Johnson County Mental Health Center at 913-826-4200 to talk about starting services. If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, call the 24/7 Crisis Line at 913-268-0156.

Winter weather options from the Johnson County Library
When the weather is cold and dreary, there’s nothing like curling up on the couch with a hot drink and a good... digital resource? Johnson County Library has a wealth of eResources and virtual services available at the click of a button – no need to brave the elements! All you need is your library card and PIN number. Kids: Preschoolers and early readers will love our new Storytimes on Demand on Facebook, while school-aged kids can get customized homework help through Brainfuse HelpNow. Teens: Get a jump on a new language with access to Rosetta Stone and Mango Languages, and stream award-winning documentaries, indie films and world cinema through Kanopy. Adults: Considering a big purchase after the new year? Consult Consumer Reports. Or maybe a new job is in your future – get resume and interview tips through Brainfuse JobNow or Job and Career Accelerator, then pick up a new skill with Udemy’s thousands of on-demand video courses. Seniors: Stay up to date with local, national and global news with over 3,500 eMagazines and a wide selection of eNewspapers – no subscription fee is required if you log in through the library! And if you’re missing a trip to the theater, watch critically acclaimed productions from U.K. National Theatre Collection. ☑
Shop safely for yourself and your loved ones
As families reframe their holiday plans and traditions this year, they are also reevaluating holiday spending and shopping strategies. Consumers are looking for convenient, safe and efficient holiday shopping options. Local retailers have created safe shopping opportunities including buying online to retrieve in store, home delivery and contactless curbside pick-up.

Consumers are also looking for great deals and low prices. Deloitte’s 2020 Holiday Survey found that 38% of consumers surveyed plan to spend less on their holidays this year, particularly as Americans travel less in favor of smaller holiday celebrations at home. Experts predict consumers will purchase fewer gifts and focus more on furniture, home furnishings and holiday décor. Food and beverage sales are likely to increase, as well as purchases for pets newly acquired during the pandemic.

The Johnson County District Attorney’s Consumer Protection Division suggests tips for safely navigating holiday shopping as consumers search for bargains this year:

- Set and stick to a budget, beware of deals that seem to be too good to be true.
- Visit only trusted websites and be cautious in following links in unsolicited emails.
- Research businesses in advance, including return policies, delivery schedules and Better Business Bureau ratings.
- Pay with credit cards rather than releasing funds directly from your bank account via debit card or wire transfer.
- Create strong online passwords and change those passwords regularly.
- Track packages and be prepared to retrieve items from your porch quickly after delivery.

For more information and assistance contact the DA’s Consumer Protection Division at 913-715-3003 or visit da.jocogov.org/consumer-protection.

How to support your neighbors during the holidays
BY BRANDY HODGE

At the on-set of COVID-19, hundreds of residents expressed concern for our vulnerable neighbors and asked how they could help. Aging and Human Services created an Amazon wish list essential food and hygiene drive... a virtual way to safely give to people in need. Participants shop safely for others from home, and Amazon delivers the items to the Olathe office. In just one month, they received $20,000 in donated food and hygiene products which carried the food pantries through mid-October.

In a typical year, many community organizations and schools host holiday drives for the food pantries. This year has seen a significant decrease in community donations. Aging and Human Services has relaunched its food and hygiene drive through Amazon. Residents can help by purchasing items off the wish list to help their neighbors during the holiday season at: https://a.co/7Qn5DH0

Aging & Human Services Outreach division provides essential services such as utility assistance, food pantry, vouchers for the Kansas City Medicine Cabinet, information, and referrals to community organizations. Anyone who needs assistance or would like to host a food drive, may call 913-715-6653.
When it comes to Johnson County economic development, activities such as developing land, creating tax incentives and attracting business are the responsibility of cities. The one place Johnson County Government supports the creation of economic development is at the New Century AirCenter in between Olathe and Gardner. After 5 years of work and several policy decisions by the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) in collaboration with the Johnson County Airport Commission, new economic development will be landing at the New Century AirCenter in the near future.

“Creating new economic development at the New Century AirCenter has been a long time in coming,” said BOCC Chairman Ed Eilert. “This is going to bring private sector jobs and added revenue to Johnson County which will help the county’s airports continue to be as self-sufficient as possible.”

From naval air station to industry hub

New Century Business Park has a storied history. New Century AirCenter once housed the Olathe Naval Air Station that opened on Oct. 1, 1942. It was used as a combat pilot training center from World War II through the Vietnam era. Notable Americans such as future astronaut and United State Senator John Glenn and TV game show host Bob Barker were among the thousands of pilots to receive their military wings at Olathe Naval Air Station. Johnson County acquired the airport in 1973 and renamed it Johnson County Industrial Airport. The mid-1990’s brought new opportunities as the business park positioned itself to meet the needs of local, national and international businesses and in 1994, it was renamed to New Century AirCenter.

The Airport Commission began planning and developing an industrial park on the western side in an area not needed for future airport operations. The railway system constructed by the Navy to support its logistics operations was already in place and became a major selling point for drawing businesses to the new industrial park.

New Century Business Park on the west side of the AirCenter houses leaders in the fields of printing, food processing, manufacturing, logistics distribution and aviation. Well-known brands including Country Crock, I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter, and Duke’s Mayonnaise are produced there. Over 60 other companies and organizations that employ more than 4,000 private-sector employees are located at the AirCenter.

A plan to expand

A new development opportunity started several years ago in 2015 when an idea was introduced to solicit a Master Developer for New Century AirCenter. The goals included leveraging available land to create revenue streams to support financial self-sufficiency and introduce economic development opportunities.

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad joined the conversation around the development of the AirCenter business park in 2019, expressing the need for rail-served sites that were served by a shortline railroad similar to the one located at New Century and included laydown yards.

Plans for economic development slowed down during a three-year process to complete a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) required environmental assessment so the land could be released for non-aviation use. The project began to gain momentum in 2020 with the following BOCC actions that came recommended by the Airport Commission:

• July 16: adopted a revised economic development policy for Johnson County that changed the allowable tax abatements to better attract businesses.

• Oct. 8: approved master development agreement for development at New Century and selected VanTrust Real Estate, LLC. for Master Development Services.

• Oct. 22: adopted a master resolution of intent relating to the issuance of not to exceed $278,415,690 of industrial revenue bonds for new facilities and improvements and granted up to a 75%, 10-year tax abatement for New Century.

“We are thrilled to work with VanTrust on this exciting development opportunity,” said Aaron Otto, executive director, Johnson County Airport Commission. “VanTrust’s holistic approach will unlock the economic value of these properties and generate a substantial and durable revenue stream through long-term ground leases that will enhance the county’s airports financial self-sufficiency for years to come.”

This public-private partnership means that the airport will be able to expand its economic footprint in the county while also seeking to continue its tradition of paying its own way and not relying on taxpayer dollars.

“We knew when we first received the RFP for this project that it represented an opportunity to partner with the Johnson County Airport Commission and the county in the execution of a long term vision that would bring lasting benefits to the residents of Johnson County,” said Rich Muller, executive
vice president of VanTrust. “We are thrilled to be chosen as the master developer and look forward to seeing the positive economic impact this development will have on expanding the entire Southwest Johnson County submarket.”

**Why New Century?**

Over 400 acres of land are under long-term lease; over 1,000 acres remain available for long-term lease in development parcels from 1-500 acres to fit client’s needs. At New Century, initial terms of leases are typically 20 to 30 years, with options to extend in multi-year increments for a total of 50 to 99 years. New Century Business Park now has the opportunity for over 800 new acres to be developed on the north and east sides. The new development is currently a greenfield site, meaning that it is undeveloped and offers a high degree of personalization to developers like VanTrust and the businesses who locate there because land can be developed to suit whatever needs a business might have.

“In this age of COVID plus greater reliance on U.S. manufactured products, the outlook for industrial activity has never been better” said R. Lee Harris, president and CEO of Cohen Esrey and Vice Chair of the Johnson County Airport Commission. “NCAC is uniquely positioned to offer a manufacturing and distribution facility that is served by rail, truck, and air.

Along with easy interstate access, New Century has available land via more than six miles of shortline railroad track for space where products, materials, equipment and vehicles can be offloaded from railcars and stored until they are needed, also known as laydown yards, along with on-call rail service to the BSNF transcontinental mainline. It is a true multimodal center and one of the few logistics parks in the United States where air, rail and road come together.

**Keeping the AirCenter self-sufficient with additional benefits for the county**

In August 2019, New Century tenant CenturyLink announced it would close its offices at 600 New Century Parkway, creating a loss of $2.5 million for the Airport Commission’s budget and making it difficult for the New Century AirCenter to continue to remain self-sufficient and not rely on taxpayer dollars. According to Otto, this new economic development plan will work towards plugging in that revenue hole and brings additional benefits to the airport and Johnson County:

- Approximately 2,675 new, permanent jobs over 10 years at the location.
- A total payroll amount over this period estimated at more than $672,813,505.
- Approximately 1,875 construction jobs over 10 years with payroll of $96,750,000.
- Capital investment of $278,415,690 to include construction of new buildings.
- Railyard improvements.

“The proposed expansion of infrastructure and development on the east side of the New Century Air Center is a rare opportunity to make a large and positive impact on the Johnson County economy,” said Harris. “It means more jobs – many of them will be highly paid and skilled. It means more revenue for the cities, county and state including sales, property, and income taxes.

Make sure to watch [jocogov.org](http://jocogov.org) and our social media channels (@jocogov) for upcoming news about economic development at the New Century Air Center Business Park.
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Johnson County’s annual Veterans Day observance on Nov. 11 was a far different event than previous ones. This year’s tribute to local military veterans took place virtually. Rather than participating in the longstanding annual gathering, the 2020 Veterans Day Observance encouraged veterans, their families and friends, and residents to watch the event and veteran tributes on the county’s Facebook page and website. The Veterans Day observance began in 1987 with a public celebration on the south steps of the Johnson County Courthouse. The event has occurred annually at veteran memorial sites and two National Guard Armories throughout the county, including the cities of Olathe, Overland Park, Merriam, Lenexa, Gardner and the New Century AirCenter. “We were unable to proceed in traditional fashion, but we were not wanting to skip our annual Veterans Day tribute,” said Chairman Ed Eilert of the Board of County Commissioners and emcee for the program. “We worked hard to create a meaningful event with the health and safety guidelines of veterans, participants and attendees in mind and continued efforts to stop and contain the spread of the coronavirus.” Each year, the event salutes specific groups of veterans and others as special guests. The 2020 Veterans Day Observance honored 68 WWII veterans to commemorate the 75th anniversary to the end of the war and the Holocaust. The event, which was live-streamed online, took place in the Johnson County Administration Building in downtown Olathe. The program included a video presentation by Judy Jacobs, Overland Park, a Holocaust survivor, and U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, R-Kansas, a Marine veteran who is retiring from Congress after 40 years. Other videos featured band performances, patriotic songs, rifle salute and wreath presentation by local veteran organizations. As a highlight of the program, all 68 profiles appeared in a special video, spanning almost 13 minutes. “To those who served their country in uniform, you protected us, and it was our duty and obligation to protect you,” said Chairman Eilert. “The fact that this year’s tribute was a virtual one does not lessen or dampen the appreciation we feel or the spirit and sentiment of Veterans Day.” The WWII veterans represented all branches of the Armed Forces, including the Merchant Marines. They reflected a wide range of experiences and memories. Most served overseas with a few doing their military service statewide. The youngest veterans are 92. Six are centenarians. Two are women, including the oldest veteran who turned 106 a week before Veterans Day. The other is a British Army veteran who became a war bride and a new American after the war. Many of the featured veterans were in the thick of combat in Europe and in the Pacific Theater against Japan. Some were awarded medals for valor and Purple Hearts for wounds. A few were called back to service or reenlisted to fight in the Korean War five years after WWII ended. The start of the Korean War is commemorating its 70th anniversary this year. Profiles of the WWII veterans were displayed three-four at a time daily online on the county’s website at jocogov.org leading up to Veterans Day. The profiles, as well as video recording of the event, are available at jocogov.org/JoCoHonorsVets.
Notice of Appraised Values to be mailed in March

BY JENNIFER THOMPSON

Wondering what your property is worth? On or before the first of March each year, the Johnson County Appraiser mails Notices of Appraised Value to real estate owners. By March 1, you’ll receive a Notice of Appraised Value form that provides the current year and prior year history of your property’s valuation.

The annual Notice of Appraised Value shows actual sales data on property considered in the valuation of property. This information is located halfway down on the front of the notice. Three to five days after the mailing date of the Notice of Appraised Value you can access a PDF version online. A webpage launched last year allows you to access mapping and property value information in a single location. (ims.jocogov.org/locationservices)

### Residential (January – September)

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<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average Sale Price</td>
<td>$362,301</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7,529</td>
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It is evident the Residential Real Estate market has remained surprisingly strong throughout 2020 thus far. In addition to January – September sales, we are working through our 2021 valuation analysis by reviewing October – December 2020 sales as they come available. If the residential market remains this active, we are looking at a higher than expected increase in average sale price, perhaps as much as 6 to 9 percent. If this forecast holds true, the overall increase in residential appraised value could be in the 4 to 8 percent range, with some areas seeing slightly lower value changes while some areas again may encounter higher increases due to strong demand. The Johnson County real estate market continues to be affected by the low inventory of residential properties on the market and very favorable mortgage rates which continues putting upward pressure on sale prices.

To appeal or not to appeal?
If you believe your property is valued fairly but taxes are too high, an appeal probably won’t help. Instead, you should attend the public hearings held by the governmental groups that set tax rates. Each invites public comment.

If you think the appraised value is more than you would reasonably get if you sold your property, you should consider an appeal. Remember the Appraiser is required to value all property at “fair market value.”

The Appraiser’s Office tries to make the process as simple as possible. The appeal form and instructions are on the back of the Notice of Appraised Value. Depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic, you may request an in-person hearing. However, in efforts to ensure the safety of the public and staff, the Appraiser’s Office strongly encourages you to file your appeal online. These options include Hearing Based on Evidence (HBE) or a telephone hearing.

By law, you must file your appeal 30 days subsequent to the date of mailing of the valuation notice (K.S.A. 79-1448).

What happens after I appeal?
The first level of an appeal is the informal hearing. You are notified by mail at least 10 days prior to the date of the hearing. Once you start this appeal, be sure to pursue it to your satisfaction. If you drop it, you cannot appeal later on the same property in the same tax year. If you have any questions along the way, please feel free to call the Appraiser’s Office at 913-715-9000. You can also visit the office at 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 2100, Olathe.


Get the extra support and care you deserve.

UnitedHealthcare Community Plan offers KanCare members added benefits and services to help you stay healthy.
Johnson County
Board of County Commissioners

The legislative powers of Johnson County Government are vested in a seven-member Board of County Commissioners that exercises its authority to ensure the general health, safety and welfare of the public.

The board is composed of an at-large chairman and one representative from each of the six districts in the county.

The Johnson County Board of County Commissioners consists of:

- **Chairman Ed Eilert**
  - 913-715-0500

- **Becky Fast**
  - 1st District
  - 913-715-0431

- **Janeé Hanzlick**
  - 4th District
  - 913-715-0434

- **Jim Allen**
  - 2nd District
  - 913-715-0432

- **Michael Ashcraft**
  - 5th District
  - 913-715-0435

- **Steve Klika**
  - 3rd District
  - 913-715-0433

- **Mike Brown**
  - Vice chair, 6th District
  - 913-715-0436

County commission districts

[Map of Johnson County showing district boundaries]

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**Farewell to outgoing commissioners**

This January we will say goodbye to three of our seven-member Board of County Commissioners. They include Commissioner Jim Allen (District Two), Commissioner Steve Klika (District Three) and Commissioner Mike Brown (District Six.)

Commissioner Jim Allen is a 2nd District native born and reared in Shawnee where he continues to work and live. District Two also includes Lake Quivira, the northern half of Lenexa and a small southeast portion of Bonner Springs. His first term began in 2009 and January marks the end of his third term. Commissioner Allen’s board assignments include the Planning Commission, Transportation Council and ATA representative.

Commissioner Steve Klika joined the BOCC in 2013 and will complete his second term in January 2021. He represents the Third District which includes parts of Overland Park, Stilwell and unincorporated Johnson County. Commissioner Klika’s board assignments include the Johnson County Park & Recreation District Board, Southeast Consolidated Zoning Board and Investment Review Committee.

Commissioner Mike Brown joined the BOCC in 2017. In addition to serving as Vice Chairman of the Board, Commissioner Brown’s board assignments include the Audit Committee, the Airport Commission and sitting on both the Northwest and Southwest Consolidated Zoning Boards. District Six is made up of a bulk of Johnson County’s unincorporated area that stretches to the southern and western county lines. In addition to the rural area, the 6th District includes the communities of Gardner, De Soto and Edgerton, along with the western portions of the city of Olathe. The district also includes the townships of Gardner, Lexington, McCamish and Olathe.

Please watch jocogov.org and our social media channels (@jocogov) for details on how the BOCC and the county will formally say good-bye and thank you to our outgoing commissioners, as well as swearing in details for the three incoming commissioners.

Johnson County Government and the Board of County Commissioners want to deeply thank Commissioners Allen, Klika and Brown for their service.
10 things your BOCC authorized in 2020


2. FY 2021 budget with a .25 mill levy reduction.

3. David “Beau” Boisvert as the County Appraiser.

4. Stormwater Management Program’s new approach to handling stormwater on a watershed basis rather than by cities.

5. Rebuilding our website jocogov.org to be more resident-focused and easier to navigate.

6. Additional voting equipment for the Johnson County Election Office to make voting in person as safe as possible during a pandemic.

7. A ballot question in the November general election asking voters if they wanted to eliminate the requirement that public places which sell liquor by the drink must have a portion of sales come from food.

8. Additional $250,000 for 2021 to provide more direct services for senior citizens and made department changes to increase the visibility of Aging Services.

9. Saved residents approximately $13 million by taking advantage of historically low interest rates and refinancing 10 prior bonds.

10. Paved the way for new economic development at New Century AirCenter Business Park, expected to eventually create approximately 2,670 jobs over 10 years.

At its weekly business sessions the Board of County Commissioners votes on important policy decisions that impact the daily lives of residents, businesses and visitors to our community.
BY LORI SAND

What do you enjoy most about your job with Johnson County Government? Having never worked inside of a government agency, it is a lot of fun to learn about the history of Johnson County and Kansas through the historically rich survey documents we use to research new projects. Not only that, but then we go out into the field and find the accompanying monuments set by the very people who populated the historical documents I have just read. It’s a profound thing and it happens all the time.

What tips do you have for staying warm? Layers for the win! In tandem with covering your extremities, ex: gloves and a head covering. Sweating while working in the lower temps is a thing with this approach, so cool yourself off by removing gloves first. You’ll lose that excess heat and remain comfortable without exposing your damp torso or ears to the elements.

How does the work you do affect the lives of Johnson County residents? One of the many responsibilities of the Survey Department is maintaining the survey reference monuments which the county is laid out over (roads and property corners). We try to keep these monuments easily retrievable for other users such as surveying companies. When these are maintained in this way, it reduces the effort users must spend to do their jobs, such as property surveys for citizens (who reap the benefits of a survey completed in less time). We want to support that process as stewards of the survey monuments.

Steve Blue
Grounds Specialist
With the county for 1.5 years

What do you enjoy most about your job with Johnson County Government? I truly enjoy working with our team on the grounds crew. They are the most thoughtful, helpful and hard-working people I have ever worked with! Our work environment affords us the opportunity to be out on our properties early in the morning, viewing the beautiful sunrise as we put a shine on our grounds for the day.

What tips do you have for staying warm? The best way to help stay warm is to dress in layers which allow you to shed a layer if you get too warm. It is also important to stay dry as nothing chills you like being wet. You should also have warm, waterproof boots to keep your feet warm and dry. Lastly, wear a warm hat as you lose most of your heat through your head.

How does the work you do affect the lives of Johnson County residents? I believe that when our residents visit our facilities, they will find them well kept, safe and attractive. We take great pride in our work as it is a reflection on Johnson County as a whole and the grounds are a great way to make a good first impression!
This fall, approximately 40 county employees from across multiple departments gathered in the new Johnson County Courthouse to review and exercise their response to a hazardous material exposure. The exercise was meant to prepare local officials in the event of a biological threat to county properties.

Employees from the Sheriff’s Office, District Court Judges, Court Administrators, and Facilities staff joined instructors Detective Jon Hutcheson from the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office and Captain Thomas Hoegler with the Olathe Fire Department, as well as personnel from the FBI Joint Terrorism Taskforce – Weapons of Mass Destruction and FBI Hazardous Evidence Response Team (HERT) to examine the county protocol in the event of a hazardous material exposure.

The first evidence of an attack may be when you notice symptoms of the disease caused by exposure to an agent. In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger.

One of the exercises involved a threatening letter addressed to a District Court Judge containing an unidentified substance. The exercise also included someone who suffered an exposure to this substance and began showing symptoms. Instructors talked through proper FBI protocol to include how to preserve the crime scene and HERT discussed their response and protocols for preserving evidence. Additional conversation included the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed in case of an exposure and the initial response procedures for local law enforcement.

Information sharing is critical in these types of incidents, both within the organization and with external sources including news media. All available resources will be utilized in a hazardous material incident within our county buildings and any pertinent information to public health and safety will be broadcast appropriately. Depending on the type of hazard, the exposure area may require evacuation.

The Sheriff’s Office and partners in Johnson County constantly work to stay updated and informed to ensure the safety and security of not only Johnson County properties, but the residents they serve.
Celebrating a successful November general election

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total voter turnout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of advance voters</td>
<td>60%</td>
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</table>

“We keep everybody spaced out. We’re not having a problem with people having to wait very long. I had a really good crew of election workers this year.”

Bob Altic
Johnson County election worker

“It was a lot quicker and easier than I was expecting. I was in and out in five minutes. It feels good. It feels like something I have to do... my civic duty.”

Ryan Cox, first time Johnson County voter

“I like the feeling of coming in person. I walked right in and everything was distanced so I felt safe doing it.”

Alexa Sakaguchai
Johnson County voter