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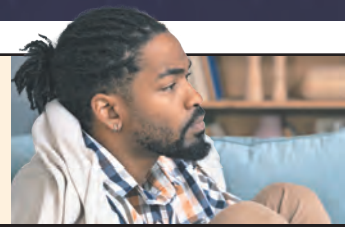
POLITICAL BOSS

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**VOICE
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STORY**



Push for Kansas Medical Marijuana Legalization Looks to Ensure Equity

The Community Voice hosted a successful forum discussing possible medical marijuana in Kansas.



By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

An online forum hosted by The Community Voice on 420 Day brought together advocates, legislators, and business leaders to discuss the ongoing effort to legalize medical marijuana in Kansas and to discuss what equitable involvement from communities of color should look like.

State Rep. Ford Carr and state Sen. Mary Ware provided updates on the legislative process so far and why Kansas remains one of just 12 states without any form of legalized marijuana use.

"It's Senate leadership and the majority party" blocking previous bills, Ware said of the repeated failures to pass medical marijuana laws despite years of trying.

The latest bills to get a hearing, Senate Bills 555 and 135, were criticized by advocates as overly restrictive and costly.

"They have very limited number of conditions and ailments that will allow folks to access medical cannabis," said Ware. "Both bills make it

very expensive to get into the industry."

A major topic was ensuring racial equity and participation from Black residents, businesses, and communities disproportionately impacted by marijuana criminalization.

"Unless there is social equity included in a medical marijuana bill, in my opinion, that bill can die," said one forum participant.

Cheryl Kumberg, president of the Kansas Cannabis Coalition, which started as a nurses' group advocating for medical access to marijuana, outlined patient priorities like allowances for home growing and different consumption methods as important to her organization.

Bills considered this year severely limited ways individuals could consume marijuana. Neither bill allowed for smoking marijuana. While one bill allowed consumption of gummies, another bill only allowed consumption as pills or via ointments. "It's not a one-size-fits-all thing," said Kumberg. "Situations vary from rural to urban and everybody even reacts to cannabis differently because we are inherently just different human beings."

The group discussed the importance of having measures in the bill that:

- Expunge and/or exonerate individuals who are currently serving time or who

were previously convicted on marijuana charges.

- Allow for individuals to grow a certain number of plants for their own consumption.
- An affordable option for small, Kansas and minority businesses to participate economically in the industry.

The group agreed it's important to get grassroots individuals involved in advocating for and passage of marijuana legislation, through petitions, voting and advocacy.

The group agreed, another path forward would be collaborating with groups already working on this issue and particularly those already with lobbyists on the ground in Topeka.

"The way the system works right now, you know, the lobbyists are the ones who are working directly with the legislators," said Carr.

Law enforcement involvement was cited as crucial as

well, after Carr shared that the head of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation agreed to work on a framework they could accept. "If our law enforcement people are saying that, hey, if we did it this way, we could make this work," it would be harder for opposition, Carr explained.

Finally, the group agreed that one of the important things to do was to vote individuals out of office who haven't been supportive and to vote in people who will support legalization.

Top among those who need to be ousted, advocates say, is Ty Masterson, a Republican from El Dorado who is president of the Senate. According to Ware, he is the major person holding up passage of medical marijuana legislation.

"The power is and has always been with the people," Carr said of the opposition. "We simply have to get candidates and just vote them out."

CARTOON



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New Research Still Shows Black Names Experience Bias in Hiring Process

By Voice News Service

A study has once again provided stark evidence of the harsh hiring penalties faced by job applicants with distinctively Black names. Researchers at UC Berkeley and the University of Chicago responded to over 83k job postings at 97 Fortune 500 companies using fictitious applicants with names coded as White, Black, male or female.

The disturbing findings show applicants with White-sounding names received about 9% more callbacks than those with Black names overall. At the worst offending companies, the racial gap in callbacks was a shocking 24% favoring presumed White applicants.

“When assessing gender differences, the researchers did not find prominent differences in callback rates between male and female applicants overall—racial differences were more pronounced. Results did vary by industry and firm, with the automobile industry having more pronounced racial differences in callback rates than other industries. The research also revealed that the smallest estimated racial bias was within food stores.

Putting the names out there is to move away from companies’ performative allyship around diversity and inclusion,” study co-author Pat Kline of UC Berkeley told NPR.

The findings build on a 2003 study that found a staggering 50% gap in callback rates favoring White names over Black names when sending matching resumes to employers. In the study, researchers analyzed the callback rates for identical resumes with either Black or White names in Boston and Chicago. The results of their study provided evidence of pervasive racial discrimination against Black-sounding names during the hiring process.

“I’ve seen it throughout organizations up into the C-suite,” career coach Dorianne St Fleur told NPR. “Many of my clients with the right credentials still aren’t getting hired.”

The new research reveals Black males faced the lowest callback rates of any group, followed by Black females. Industries like auto dealers, retailers and manufacturers exhibited among the highest rates of bias



Sharonda or Rhonda Does your name prevent you from getting that job.

MICHAEL ZHANG - DELIGHT IMAGES

against Black applicants.

On a positive note, some major companies like Charter/Spectrum and Kroger showed little racial skew in hiring. Factors associated with lower bias included being a federal contractor and having centralized, standardized HR processes.

“Even if individuals have unconscious biases, it’s not automatic those translate to organizational bias with the right processes,” said Kline.

Name bias isn’t just a United States phenomenon. According to Forbes, a 2007 Swedish study found that job applicants with Swedish-sounding names received more callbacks than job applications with Arabic or African-sounding names across different occupations.

St Fleur advises strategies like anonymizing resumes initially, multi-reviewer panels and interviewer anti-bias training to promote equitable hiring. “Companies need to collect data and standardize the process,” she said. “The fact some firms did so well shows it’s possible.”

The findings validate longstanding concerns in the Black community about discriminatory employment barriers. Yet the positive examples offer a path forward.

The study comes amid backlash against diversity initiatives, which critics falsely claim create racial preferences rather than dismantle systemic disadvantages that research clearly demonstrates.

With commitment from employers and resilience from job seekers, St Fleur said, “It’s very possible to build an equitable process.”

Broad Changes in Kansas License Suspension Law Will Prove Helpful to Many

With law enforcement finally coming on board, the Kansas Legislature was able to pass broad driver's license suspension reform.

Key Points:

- Kansas passed SB500 to make it easier for drivers to drive legally.
- Drivers who don't pay fines within 30 days will have their licenses restricted.
- Courts must offer waivers, reductions, and payment plans for fees, fines, and costs.

By **Bonita Gooch**
Editor-in-Chief

The Kansas Legislature just passed State Bill 500 to make it easier for some drivers with a suspended or revoked license to drive again legally. But the new changes do not go into effect until Jan. 1, 2025.

After that date, drivers who have not paid their traffic

fines and court costs within 30 days will automatically have their license restricted versus suspended by the court and the Kansas Dept. of Revenue's Division of Vehicles (DOV).

That's a big change from the state's previous approach that immediately suspended individuals' driver's licenses and gave them little time to make arrangements or pay their fines and fees.

In addition, the bill requires all courts to offer waiver, reduction of fees, fines and court costs, and allow for payment plans for those fees, fines, and costs. So if an individual doesn't have the money to pay the fine in full, as long as they reach a payment agreement with the court and stick to the plan, their license will not be suspended.

In addition, the law allows individuals to petition the court to waive a portion of their fine or costs. By the law, the clerks of the district and municipal

courts must make forms available for individuals to make this request.

Individuals who fail to make payment arrangements or pay their fines within the first 30 days, have an additional 60 days to reach a payment agreement or pay their fine before their license is suspended. If the individual takes those steps within those 60 days, their full driver's license status is "restored."

"This, to me, is the most important bill we're going to pass this session," said Sen. Oletha Faust-Goudeau. "This was truly a bi-partisan effort. A lot of the major changes happened because of law enforcement, who this year finally stepped up and worked with us on the implementation of some real and positive change we had been hoping for years."

According to SB500, the option for automatic restriction versus suspension of an individual's license only applies to individuals who have no more than three convictions for driving on a canceled, suspended, or revoked license. The option also is not available to individuals whose licenses were suspended for reasons other than "failure to comply" i.e. pay their fines.

Restricted License

While this process is much more driver-friendly, individuals must recognize

that if they didn't pay their ticket in the first 30 days, their license status is restricted. Currently, individuals with restricted licenses are limited to driving for the following permissible activities:

- To and from work and school
 - To and from drug or alcohol counseling
 - To and from an appointment with a healthcare provider or during a medical emergency
 - In the course of your employment
 - Any place you are required to go by a court
- Effective Jan. 1, 2025, the new law adds these to the list of permissible activities for drivers with a suspended license:

- Transporting children to and from school
- Purchasing groceries or fuel
- Attending religious worship services

Currently Restricted or Suspended

Kansas Legal Services estimates more than 200,000 Kansans have suspended licenses.

It's how the bill handles these individuals that Sheila Officer, chair of the Wichita Racial Profiling Commission, says she's not certain about.

Officer and members of the commission have been working on revisions to the state's policies on driver's license suspensions and revocations for years, and while they're pleased with the positive changes they're clear on, they're still concerned about what's in the final version of the bill and how it will be implemented.

"The wording is very confusing," says Officer.

The Community Voice team presented a request to the Division of Vehicles for clarification on several areas of the bill we found confusing, but as of press time, we haven't received further clarification.

Faust-Goudeau and members of the Racial Profiling Commission had a list of changes they had hoped to see in the bill: some of them are in it for sure, others they're not certain about.

One change definitely made is that individuals whose licenses were suspended would no longer have to pay a \$100 reinstatement fee for each charge associated with the citation the individual did not pay. Now they only have to pay one \$100 reinstatement fee.

Another positive change that appears to be in the bill for individuals with existing suspended and revoked licenses is that tickets older than five years are no longer considered in the determination of suspension or restriction of driving privileges. For that reason, an individual with all their tickets older than five years should automatically become eligible to have their licenses reinstated.

The law requires the DOV to notify suspended or restricted individuals that they could be eligible for their driving privileges to be restored.

In a move advocates had most hoped for, the bill authorizes an individual whose license is revoked for driving while the person's driving privilege was canceled, suspended, or revoked only for failure to comply, to apply for a restricted license. How long these restricted licenses are good for, isn't very clear, says Officer.

Under existing law, licenses were revoked for a period of three years.

"That may have possibly been removed," says Officer. "We're also not clear how long the restricted license is good for. There's a lot to consider, especially with tickets older than five years being removed from consideration."

Both The Community Voice and the Racial Profile Commission are planning events to further clarify what's in the law and how it will work, particularly for individuals who currently have suspended or restricted licenses.

The Community Voice is planning a webinar for early May with expert panelists. Stay tuned to our website and social media pages for an announcement on the date and time.

The Racial Profiling Commission is planning a community meeting in August.

For individuals who have their licenses currently suspended, Officer says, don't wait, you may already qualify for a restricted license.

However, until Jan. 1, 2025, individuals with revoked licenses are still not eligible for a restricted license.

Faust-Goudeau says, not and in the future, just don't throw your ticket in the back seat and hope it goes away.

"I want to suggest to people that as soon as you get a ticket, call the number at the bottom of the ticket and set up payment arrangements," says Faust-Goudeau. "I also want to encourage people to utilize measures we have in law right now. They can go to a walk-in docket, get their fines reduced, and [maybe] do some community service in lieu of paying [their fine]."



Kansas Senator Oletha Faust-Goudeau scores big with SB500

KC Charter School Wins Legal Battle to Remain Open After Charter Revocation

Charter schools have the right to go to court to challenge attempts by Missouri to shutter them, an appeals court has ruled.

By **Annelise Hanshaw**
Missouri Independent

Key Points:

- A Missouri appeals court ruled in favor of a Kansas City charter school.
- The appeals court decision rejects the State Board of Education's argument and allows judicial review.
- The State Board of Education and the Missouri Charter Public School Commission pulled the charter citing poor performance.

A Kansas City charter school for at-risk students will be allowed to stay open after an appeal of the state's decision to revoke its charter.

The presiding judge of Missouri's Court of Appeals Western District ruled on April 23 that a charter school has the right to judicial review if the state attempts to shut it down.

The case comes after the State Board of Education and the Missouri Charter Public School Commission pulled the charter of KC's Genesis School last year, citing poor performance.

The appeals court decision, which follows a Cole County judge's earlier ruling in favor of Genesis, rejects the State Board of Education's argument that the board has final authority over a charter's status.

Mallory McGowin, spokesperson for the Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), said the department is looking at the ruling for potential procedural changes. Otherwise, she said, the State Board of Education's role will remain as it is now and continue making decisions about charters.

McGowin could not comment on whether the department planned to appeal the decision.

Genesis Claims Data Issue

During the original Cole County hearing, Genesis' attorneys argued that the state didn't have enough consecutive years of performance data to justify closing the school. When the Missouri Charter Public School Commission met to consider the charter early in 2023, the latest performance data was from the 2017-18 school year.

The original case in Cole County reversed the charter revocation. The State Board of Education's argument in appellate court was



Antoine Lee, member of the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, addresses a not-so-friendly crowd at a hearing in January 2023 to consider repealing the charter for Genesis School.

that a 2012 change to the law governing charter schools prevents them from seeking judicial review but it did not challenge the underlying argument – that the data was outdated.

In April 2023, the State Board of Education heard Genesis's appeal. Genesis, a K-8 school with a focus on high-risk students, had low-performance scores and average growth, according to an assessment released a month before that hearing.

The Cole County judge ultimately determined the state's decision to pull Genesis' charter was "unlawful and arbitrary" because of the lack of data.

In the appeals court ruling, the judge wrote that Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven noted "deficiencies" in the charter commission's process. Still, the board made the decision to revoke Genesis' charter.

The state education department had concerns with the Missouri Charter Public School Commission's revocation process, McGowin said, but it had "even more significant concerns with allowing a school with long-term, chronic performance issues to remain open, particularly in the face of the educational uncertainty its attending families were facing in planning for the coming school year."

Impact of Recent Ruling

Chuck Hatfield, the attorney representing Genesis, said the case is not likely to change the oversight of charter schools beyond allowing them to appeal administrative decisions.

"The issue the Court of Appeals decided



Genesis Charter School serves high risk students in KCMO

was just whether a charter school has standing, but the underlying problem is they didn't have [performance] data because of COVID," he said. "So I can't imagine that's gonna happen again."

For Kevin Foster, executive director of Genesis School, the process was "traumatic."

"We didn't find out until July that we were going to be open, and we survived," he said.

Students were worried, Foster said, about where they were going to attend school, sometimes pulling focus from their schoolwork.

Supporting a School for High Risk Students

In December, Genesis scored 62% in the newest performance reports from the state's education department. The KC School District scored 66.6%.

Genesis' score is composed of two factors, performance and continuous improvement, in which the school scored 44% and 92.3%, respectively.

Foster said this illustrates the school's ability to teach kids who enroll with a lower knowledge base than students in other areas and schools.

Genesis is located in Census Tract 60, an area where around 5% of residents have at least a bachelor's degree and 31% are below the poverty line. Foster said 81% of his students live within three miles of the school.

All the students at Genesis are eligible for

free or reduced lunch, compared to a state-wide rate of 47.4%.

The school markets itself for these students, setting itself as a space for a high-risk population. Foster said the state's system of accountability deters charter schools like this.

"The accountability system is not designed to encourage people to do this work," he said. "Not only is it not designed to encourage me to do this work, but now they are literally trying to close us, to take away our ability to do the work."

The school's charter will be up for renewal in 2025. Foster hopes a sponsor will continue to partner with Genesis.

"People just have a model of what reform is gonna look like, and a small little community charter school serving an at-risk population just doesn't fit their model," he said.

Hatfield said the state's accountability program may continue to impact charter schools that serve high-risk students.

"That's a real challenge for the way DESE does their (Missouri School Improvement Program) standards these days," he said. "The schools that are really focused on highly challenged children, they are going to close a lot of them down if they are not more thoughtful about it."

The Missouri Charter Public School Commission could not be reached for comment.

Political Boss Jeanna Repass: A Force to be Reckoned With in Kansas Politics

Jeanna Repass, former candidate for Kansas Secretary of State, is Chair of the Kansas Democratic Party and determined to make a difference in Kansas politics.

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Jeanna Repass is a tough woman for a tough job. After an unsuccessful but impressive run for Kansas secretary of state in 2022, she was the kind of contender the Democrats didn't want to see crawl back into the woodwork.

A daughter of a minister, with a full and demanding voice, she knew how to rouse a crowd, and when she got their attention, she had something impressive to say.

It was a winning combination. Not quite enough to garner the position of the state's top election officer, but it did help catapult her to the position of chair of the Kansas Democratic Party.

Elected chair in early 2022, it wasn't a position she was looking to hold. However, when the governor asks you to run, it's hard to say no.

Now at the head of the party for just over one year, she's accomplished many of her goals, and is more determined than ever to score wins for Kansas Democrats in November, even though it's not her that's running.

Key Points:

- Jeanna Repass, chair of Kansas Democratic Party, had a successful first year.
- Now she's focusing on winning a veto-proof majority in the Kansas Legislature.
- Repass, who ran for statewide office in 2022, has political aspirations.
- She encourages voting, running for office, and volunteering.

Year One Accomplishments

After an initial analysis of where the party stood, Repass says she started her first year with four objectives and she feels she accomplished them all.

Recognizing it takes a good team to get the job done, she expanded the party staff, adding two full-time members and replacing a few people along the way. She also worked on improving the party's brand, which, for a statewide organization, required a lot of travel across the state and speaking on her part.

Anybody who knows anything about politics, knows it takes a lot of money to run and win campaigns.

When Repass took over, she says, "the budget was insufficient to stand up a winning party." So they started raising money. The fundraising strategy included going after "higher capacity investors," but they didn't forget the grassroots Democrats who are the heart of the party.

Repass says the organization is still working on growing the number of their Blue Kansas Club members, an organization of those who give monthly to the party. Finally, she says she worked to unify the party.

"I believe the Democrats are as unified as we've ever been," says Repass. That's in sharp comparison to the Republicans, both nationally and in the state, who are starkly divided.

Republicans are trying to purge their special-interest caucuses, like their Latino, African-American, LGBTQ, and women's groups, out of their party leadership committee. In contrast, those caucuses are part of the Democrats' executive leadership team and Repass supports and encourages their voices and engages them as often as possible.

She's doing the work and putting in a tremendous amount of effort, the kind of effort Democrats need to grow our party to be strong and competitive statewide," says Kerry Gooch, a former executive director of the Kansas Democratic Party, who has seen the party from the inside and knows what it takes.

2024 Election Goal

More than just a presidential election, this is a big year in Kansas politics. All four congressional seats, all 40 state Senate seats and all 125 members of the Kansas House are up for reelection. As Kansas Democratic chair, Repass is serious about

seeing Democrats come through the election with a net gain in seats.

She has a candidate set to run in each of the four congressional seats. Important is protecting Sharice Davids' seat, the only Democratic congressional member from Kansas. However, with Jake LaTurner not seeking reelection, Repass is hopeful Democrats might be able to gain the second congressional seat. While she says she has a candidate set to run in that seat, she wasn't ready to announce the name quite yet.

Repass says her goal for the state Senate and House is to get enough Democrats in seats to be able to keep the Republicans from being able to overturn Gov. Laura Kelly's vetoes.

"As Democrats, we stand behind our Democratic governor and my job as the state chair is to make sure that the legislation she wants to put forward has support," Repass says. "We really need to get to a place where we have enough Democrats that if the governor vetoes a bad piece of legislation, that veto can be sustained by Democrats."

During the 2022 session, Kelly vetoed 19 bills and the Republicans were able to override her veto 13 times, but 10 of those times were by one vote. To guarantee the power to sustain the governor's veto, the Democrats need to have 14 of 40 seats in the Senate. They currently have 11. In the House, they need 42 of 125 seats. They currently have

40. However, with Marvin Robinson, a Democrat from Wyandotte County, voting 95% or more of the time with the Republicans, Repass is aiming for 43 seats in the House, to give Democrats the votes they need.

2024 Party Election Strategy

The Democrats have a strategy they believe will help them reach their election goal. They're focusing heavily on, and investing in, what they call Tier One Protects and Tier One Pickups.

Tier One Protects are seats Democrats may have picked up from Republicans, who want to get them back. Tier

One Pickups are seats where Democrats ran a candidate last time who came in close and they feel they might just be able to get a win this time.

An example of a Tier One Pickup is Stacey Knoell, an African-American female who ran for a Senate seat in Johnson County.

"She closed a 20-point gap and ended up losing by just six percentage points, just 1800 votes," said Repass. She pointed to another race the Dems lost by just 60 votes.

Tier Two seats are Democrats who could be in danger of losing their seats. They may have won in districts that are not that

See REPASS Page 7 →



Jeanna Repass

Meet Jackson County Democrat Chair Dee Evans

In heavily Democratic Jackson County the upcoming primaries are a big thing.

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter



Dee Evans

The Jackson County Democratic Committee has played a pivotal role in local Kansas City politics since its founding in 1932 under infamous chairman Tom Pendergast, who ran it like a formidable political machine. While times have changed, in heavily Democratic Jackson County, the organization remains a political powerhouse.

Current Chair Dee Evans isn't the kind of political king(queen) pin that Pendergast was, however, the organization still maintains an active core of "foot soldiers" in their respective wards and townships who are dedicated to grassroots efforts and advancing Democratic values.

Evans' role as chairwoman is historic. She's the first

African-American woman to hold this prestigious position, ascending to the leadership role as a temporary chair in late 2021 after the untimely passing of then-Chair Paul Wrabec. Since then, she was officially elected to the position.

"Our No. 1 priority is working with our constituents in Jackson County, ensuring they have access to voting and getting them to the polls," Evans said. "We want people to realize that you have to vote not just in presidential elections but locally because those are the officials making laws that impact your daily life"

Political Upbringing

Evans, a KC native, has been deeply involved in local politics for most of her life. She recalls being a teenager engaging in grassroots door-to-door canvassing with members of her politically active family. She served as the campaign manager for her aunt Yvonne S. Wilson, during her successful campaigns for both Missouri state representative and senator.

Evans earned multiple degrees and her career work was as the University of Missouri-Kansas City's assistant director of external relations. She retired from that position in 2021.

She has been actively involved in numerous other community initiatives and organizations, including Freedom, Inc., and her longtime role as one of the co-founders who stuck with the long process of opening the nonprofit community-based WeDevelopment Credit Union

August Primary Elections

In heavily Democrat-leaning areas like most of Kansas City and

parts of Jackson County, the primary is of keen importance to determining who will ultimately win the general election.

Where there are primaries with Democrats competing against other Democrats, the committee does not endorse one over another but encourages the electorate to learn about the candidates and show up on Aug. 8.

This August, key primary races on the ballot for Jackson County voters include a prosecuting attorney and a state senate and house race. There are three Democrats competing in the primary race for prosecuting attorney: John Gromowsky, Stephanie Burton, and Melesa Johnson.

Burton and Johnson are both women of color seeking the office currently held by Jean Peters Baker. Gromowsky is a longtime lawyer who works in the current prosecutor's office. Burton is a trial attorney known for her work with the Midwest Innocence Project. Johnson formerly worked in the prosecutor's office and is currently KC's director of public safety.

"I think those in the prosecutor's race are all very qualified," says Evans. "We'll just see who the general public chooses."

For the Missouri Senate District 9 seats, incumbent Barbara Washington will face off in a primary against former KCMO Councilmember Brandon Ellington. In House District 28 seat, Mike Sager is competing against Donna Barnes in the primary. Incumbent Jerome Barnes has reached his term limit.

Another race to watch is Missouri Senate District 7, which has been occupied by Greg Razer. Gov. Mike Parson appointed Razer to the state's Tax Commission, making him ineligible to hold his senate seat. Razer has endorsed Pat Contreras to take his seat if Razer is confirmed to the tax commission, but in any case, Evans says this is a seat local Democrats can't afford to lose.

"We have an opportunity to secure our democracy in Missouri by getting out there, working hard, raising money, and supporting strong candidates," says Evans.

REPASS, from Page 6 ↓

strongly Democratic-leaning, so the party will give them some resources to help protect their seats. Tier Three and Four seats are considered safe, like the seats held by most of the African-American members of the Senate and House.

While the party isn't expecting to pick up any seats in western Kansas, she still hopes to get a candidate to run in every open seat.

"We still think it's important to get a Dem to put their name on the ballot even if they can't win," says Repass. "Nothing is more anti-American, more anti-democratic, than walking into a voting booth and not seeing any Democrats to vote for."

Repass' Political Future

When she ran for secretary

of state in 2022, Repass was among the first African-American women to run for a statewide office in Kansas. She did OK, earning 38.8% of the vote as a Democratic candidate running against a Republican incumbent.

What she did best was build a name for herself as a quality candidate with winning potential.

"She's the real deal," says Gooch, who worked closely with Repass on her campaign. "She's very well-spoken, she has a fresh perspective and a story everyone can connect with. I truly believe she can win on a statewide level."

Repass says she plans to run for office again in 2026 but is not yet willing to say what office she'll run for. Probably not because she's being secretive, but because she's seriously

weighing and considering her options.

In the meantime, a political novice when she ran the first time, her role as party chair is teaching her more than a few things about politics, fundraising and campaigning that she can put to good use the next time around.

Her Ask of Community Voice Readers

Repass says she realizes not everyone will get involved with party-level politics, but she has a few asks for our readers.

Vote: "That's not an option, that's a requirement of being a citizen of this country," Repass says, "but as an African American, our very lives depend on us voting."

Run for Office: "Why not you," she asks, particularly of

young people. "The future of the country is on your shoulders." To those who say they're too old to run, or that's not for them, she says to encourage someone you know to run. "Barack Obama didn't just fall out of nowhere. Someone encouraged him."

Volunteer: "I'm not going

to go to the 'please donate,' because I get it, money's hard and times are hard, but you can volunteer your time, which is really the best resource you have," Repass says. "Find a candidate. Find a Black candidate, find a female candidate, find a Democrat, but volunteer. Pick up the

phone, talk to a neighbor, knock on a door, but volunteer. Put sweat equity into your country, put some sweat equity into your community, put some sweat equity into yourself."

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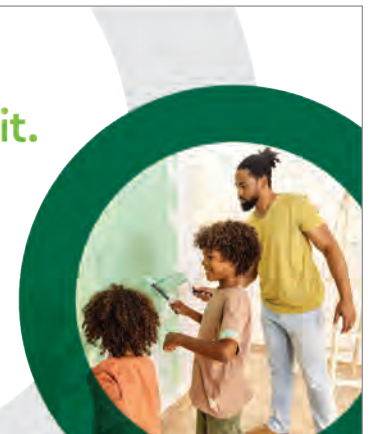


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Black Fraternities of Divine Nine to Advocate in Jefferson City

A day of networking and learning awaits the Black fraternity members in Missouri's capitol May 15

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

The five historically Black fraternities that are part of the Divine Nine will journey to the Missouri state capitol in Jefferson City May 15 for a day of legislative advocacy and civic engagement.

The fraternities - Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta - are coming together for this event organized by the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus.

"We all have historically done a lot for the community

statewide. We want to show unity, specifically as Black men, and make sure we are doing things together," said Joe Nelson, Social Action Chair for the National Pan-Hellenic Council of KC and member of Omega Psi Phi.

Cheryl Dozier, Executive Director of the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus, stressed the importance of the fraternities engaging with the political process at the state level.

"We feel that it's vitally important that our members of the Divine Nine remain legislatively aware," said Dozier. "The only way to make that happen is to have them come up and talk to legislators and take part in the process."

The day will kick off at 9 a.m. inside hearing room two of the capitol building in Jefferson City, where attendees will hear opening remarks. The fraternities will then be introduced on

the Missouri House floor before returning for sessions with state legislators.

A pair of guest speakers are also scheduled - Joe Palm, Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Ken Franklin, a government affairs manager with American Water. Dozier says the two speakers will fill in fraternity members on what projects they are working.

"We want to increase their knowledge base," said Dozier. "And we also want to hear from the fraternity members about what's going on in their communities."

In the afternoon, the fraternities will hear from Dozier about the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus' new disaster

preparedness initiative.

"We want to make sure that we let our people know what they can do to save their lives in the event of a tornado or natural disaster," she stated. "There are just not enough people who know, especially in urban areas."

Due to the shifting legislative

schedule, the full agenda has not been fully set, but Dozier expects some Black Missouri lawmakers to speak with the fraternity members as well. While no specific legislation is being advocated for, the goal is to foster connections between the Divine Nine fraternities

and state policymakers.

"We are just letting them know we're out here," says Nelson.

The event is free and open to the public to attend. Dozier invited all to "come and just have a good time and learn."



Maybe members of the Divine Nine fraternities can wear outfits from Macy's new Divine Nine menswear line when they head to the Missouri State Capitol on May 15. The new cultural heritage line debuted May 1.

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4 Conditions That Disproportionately Affect Black People

They're not that surprising but let's look the problem in the face and see how interrelated they are, as are the things we should be doing about them.

By Voice News Service

In this article, we'll review conditions that disproportionately affect Black people in the United States and the reasons behind the disparities. We'll also address what Black people can do to close the health gap for these conditions.

HEART DISEASE

Despite having lower rates than white people, Black people in the United States are 30% more likely to die from heart disease. It's also more likely to affect Black adults at a younger age.

As for many of the conditions

where health disparities exist, the reasons are complex. But it's worth noting that Black Americans have higher rates of the major risk factors for heart disease — hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and smoking.

What You Can Do

- Maintain a moderate weight.
- Check your blood pressure regularly and take steps to moderate it.
- Adopt heart-healthy habits.
- Know your family history.

OBESITY

Black adults in the United States are 30% more likely to

have obesity than white adults. This disparity is even greater for children and teens (50%) and women (50%). Obesity is a risk factor for several conditions on this list and can contribute to worse outcomes for other conditions.

What You Can Do

- Help Black children establish balanced eating habits early in life.
- Support community efforts to improve access to affordable, nutritious food.
- Regularly engage in physical activity.

DIABETES

Black adults in the United States are twice as likely as White adults to develop type 2 diabetes. That's when your body can't produce enough insulin to keep your blood sugar levels down. This disparity is largely due to genetics, high obesity rates, and socioeconomic factors.

Complications from diabetes, like kidney disease, are also more

common among Black people. Efforts to control risk factors like obesity and a sedentary lifestyle are of utmost importance.

What You Can Do

- Maintain a moderate weight.
- Eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly.
- If you have diabetes, monitor and manage your blood sugar levels to avoid complications.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

According to the American

Heart Association (AHA), 55% of Black adults in the United States have high blood pressure (hypertension). That's one of the highest rates in the world. If you're Black, it's also more likely to affect you earlier in life than it affects white people.

The AHA lists obesity and diabetes as two major contributing factors. But stress and racial discrimination might also play a role in this disparity.

The same steps you take to control other risk factors related

to heart health can help reduce your risk of hypertension or control your blood pressure if it's already high.

What You Can Do

- Eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a moderate weight.
- Limit your intake of salt and alcohol.
- Find ways to manage your stress.
- Check your blood pressure regularly.



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Seeking Mental Health Help Isn't Weakness; It Is Strength

The stigma around mental health treatment doesn't serve the Black community.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

Johnny Waller Jr. was shot in the head as a teenager. He recovered and survived physically, but the incident took a toll on his mental health.

"I had nightmares, PTSD, and other issues but didn't have access to any mental health support for years," says Waller. "We have to change that for our [Black] community."

One in five Americans deal with some mental health issue. Even Martin Luther King Jr. reportedly suffered from severe depression at times during his life, yet refused psychiatric treatment - even when urged by his staff to seek care.

This scenario sadly continues to play out today, with African Americans not seeking mental health support at nearly the same rates as their White counterparts. Even though mental health issues affect the races at roughly the same rate, only about 25% of Black people seek mental health treatment when needed, compared to 40% of White people, according to Harvard affiliate McLean Hospital. "In the Black community, if you say 'you should probably go see a therapist,' people often respond with 'what, do you think I'm crazy? I ain't crazy,'" says Waller. "There's this huge stigma about seeking mental health - that it's some kind of weakness or flaw - that we've got to address."

Where'd the Stigma Come From?

Dr. Christine M. Crawford of Boston University School of Medicine writes that the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the Black community



can be traced back to the era of slavery. At that time, the inhumane mindset was that enslaved people were not psychologically sophisticated enough to develop conditions like depression and anxiety.

Crawford says that mental health issues like depression and anxiety were dismissed in the Black community during the time of slavery. That minimization was passed down through generations, leading to the present day, where the impact of mental health conditions is underestimated. This also perpetuated the false notion that psychiatric disorders stemmed from personal weakness.

The trauma of experiencing racism itself also takes a major mental health toll on Black Americans that cannot be ignored. The CDC has declared

racism a serious public health threat that puts communities of color at heightened risk of poor mental health outcomes.

This traumatic history, combined with mistrust of the medical system due to past exploitation like the Tuskegee experiments, makes it no surprise many in the Black community hesitate to seek care.

Why It's Important to Seek Help When You Need It

"I went years without help trying to manage my feelings on my own," says Waller. "It wasn't the best way to do things."

Waller struggled in his youth and ended up incarcerated on drug charges. With the eventual help of therapy - and other factors - he turned his life around. Waller is now a community activist with multiple college degrees,

and he serves several key institutions, including positions with area universities, the city, and the board of directors for the Kansas City Black Mental Health Initiative.

"I know getting shot in the head, and my background is kind of on the extreme end," says Waller. "But I encourage anyone who's going through some issues to see a therapist."

Some Benefits of Mental Health Therapy:

- Gain relief from problematic symptoms like stress, excessive worrying, or disinterest.
- Learn coping mechanisms and strategies to deal with mental health issues.
- Maintain or enhance daily functioning
- Increased self-awareness and personal understanding.
- A better handling and

expression of emotions.

- Personal empowerment with increased confidence and a sense of purpose.

Seeking out mental health care is particularly important for those who need to work through a traumatic event or experience signs of a significant mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, or PTSD.

"If you think about what happens particularly on the east side of KC, where there's homicides, poverty, unemployment, and you're dealing with these things day-after-day, or you've been in an incident of violence: you really do need some type of mental health care to treat that trauma," says Waller.

Mental health treatment can be helpful to just about anyone and can improve your overall health. According to Dr. Kirby Randolph of the University of Kansas Medical Center, mental and physical health are interconnected, and seeking therapy can improve overall well-being and potentially reduce the risk of stress-related conditions such as high blood pressure and heart disease.

Waller says that overcoming the stigma and reaching out for help can take you from surviving to thriving. He says that those in the Black community who seek mental health services should tell their friends about how it helped them and not take it personally if someone suggests seeing a therapist.

"We're not saying that there's something inherently wrong with you," says Waller. "We're saying that you are living in trauma, and it would be beneficial to talk to someone to help you move forward and to live a meaningful life."

Culturally Competent Mental Health Care is Vital

Having the right therapist — one who understands your culture — can make all the difference.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

Finding a therapist you connect with is tough; if you're looking for a Black mental health provider, it can be even harder. Across the U.S., only 4.7% of psychologists and 4% of therapists are Black.

While there are talented mental health providers of all races, many within the Black community prefer a Black mental health professional due to their cultural connection and understanding, often referred to as cultural competence. Aside from it being more likely for someone of the same color to empathize, having someone who understands your culture can make a world of difference.

Tamara (Tami) Vang is a board member of Color Collective Kansas City, a group that connects BIPOC (black,



Indigenous and people of color) individuals seeking therapy with culturally competent mental healthcare providers. Their website — ColorCollectiveKC.org — allows you to search through a database of 100+ BIPOC providers in the KC Metro by insurance accepted, specialty, age, or a number of other factors.

Kansas City Black Mental Health Initiative (KCBMHI) board member Johnny Waller Jr. looks at it

pragmatically. He says that time with a therapist is limited and that if you don't have to explain your culture, you can spend more time working on the mental health issues you came there for.

"Being able to talk to somebody who's culturally aware is a lot better than trying to explain to your therapist why something is racist," says Waller. "You're sitting there trying to explain to somebody why some act was inherently

racist, and next thing you know, 'Oh, your hour is up.'"

Cecil Wattree, founder and executive director of KCBMI, points to cultural misunderstandings that can lead to adverse outcomes. He notes how bipolar one disorder and schizophrenia are routinely overdiagnosed in the Black community due to the design and interpretation of tests that don't take into account Black cultural differences.

Vang says individuals getting these diagnoses are most likely dealing with a trauma disorder, but because of the structure of the screening tests, Black folks can often be misdiagnosed.

"Culturally competent care is so

important," says Vang. "Small cultural differences can make a huge impact on treatment and understanding."

Vang pointed to an instance where Child Protective Services (CPS) was called on a Black parent when they took their children to a doctor's office. CPS was called because the parent was braiding the child's hair. The child was crying from the braiding and noticeably uncomfortable. To the uninitiated, this looked like child abuse.

"Someone who's culturally competent will understand that their child is not being harmed by their hair being

See **CULTURE**, Page 15 →

How to Find a Black Mental Health Provider

The Color Collective Kansas City has a listing with 100+ BIPOC mental health providers. The website allows you to search through a database of BIPOC providers in the Kansas City area by insurance accepted, specialty, age, or a number of other factors. Go to: ColorCollectiveKC.org

In Wichita a listing of nearly 35 Black mental health providers is available online. While not as easily searchable, it provides a great resource for those hoping to find a cultural competent service provider. Go to: <https://bmhprofessionals.wixsite.com/bmhp>

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New KC Black Mental Health Nonprofit to Help Through Vouchers, Support Programs

Kansas City Black Mental Health Initiative offers vouchers for free mental health and support for both those seeking help and those seeking to help.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

The Kansas City Black Mental Health Initiative (KCBMHI) just launched in January and has big plans, including giving 100 Black residents free mental health care vouchers this year.

The group's strategic plan outlines an ambitious set of programs and "bureaus" focused on education, reducing stigma, and connecting Black residents with culturally competent therapists



Cecil Wattree

and support resources.

KCBMHI aims to increase access to mental health services and destigmatize therapy in the Black community. Cecil Wattree, founder and executive director of KCBMHI, says that psychology and psychoanalysis were founded by White western



Johnny Waller

Europeans and only had other White interests in mind.

"When we start with that foundation, we have a kind of a 'colonization of therapy,'" says Wattree. "We have to decolonize therapy and diversify the mental health field."

Tamara (Tami) Vang,



Tami Vang

KCBMHI operations director, says that the mental health care system has systemic racism within it — like many other institutions — and that KCBMHI is working to change that.

She says they are working to get more Black therapists licensed, working on education

through a speaker series, and working with nontraditional providers like barbers to spread the word about the importance of Black mental health.

"A lot of times, Black traditional paradigms (way of viewing things) are saturated in survival," says Wattree. "Survival skills need to be converted to thriving skills and living skills."

Black Therapy Fund

One of the core programs from KCBMHI is a Black Therapy Fund that will provide mental health sessions to 100 people in its first year, with the goal of expanding to more people in subsequent years. KCBMHI board member Johnny Waller says that the group has been raising money to fund vouchers that will allow Black residents to pick a therapist and then use

the voucher to get free mental health services.

Each voucher covers 10 therapy sessions or \$750 worth of care and has no set expiration date. Since mental health treatment programs vary from patient to patient, the lack of a "use-by" date for the vouchers allows for flexibility. Waller says KCBMHI hopes to have applications open for these vouchers within the next 90 days.

KCBMHI's Holistic Approach

In addition to the voucher program, KCBMHI has established seven different bureaus:

- A Speakers Bureau will educate the public on mental health topics through collaboration with UMKC and other institutions.

See **NONPROFIT**, Page 15 →

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'Black Men's Locker' - A Safe Space to Heal

Four Wichita friends start an online 'safe space' for Black men to get help with mental health, overcome trauma.

Key Points:

- Four Wichita friends created "The Black Men's Locker" to provide a safe space for Black men to get help with mental health, more.
- The group has grown from four members to 12,000 worldwide and hosts in-person conferences.
- The organization aims to offer compassion, understanding, and healing to help Black men overcome systemic racism, violence and trauma.

By P.J. Griekspoor
Wichita Reporter

Four men who grew up together in Wichita have created an online "safe space" where Black men can get advice to help them cope with challenges they face in life.

They call the membership-only Facebook page "The Black Men's Locker," a space focused on mental health, physical health, success and money management, growth, healing and accountability. They also produce and post "The Black Men's Locker" podcast on YouTube.

Terry Terrell, a therapist who owns Odyssey Counseling and Consulting, is one of the founders. He also has a Facebook page under the name "Terry Talks," where he posts encouraging or motivational messages. He said the decision to form The Black Men's Locker was made in January 2023, when the negative impact of the long COVID struggle was at a peak.

The "Locker" started with the four Wichita friends as members: Terrell; Tyrice Lollis, a certified life coach, actor, musician and production specialist who also works as an account executive for Soliant in Atlanta; Noris Henderson, an entrepreneur, certified life coach, minister and project manager for Koch Industries; and Marlon Pittmon, a telecommunications specialist, DJ and social media specialist who produces the group's podcast.

They quickly learned that their perception of the need was spot-on as members flocked to the site.

Exponential Growth

"We went from four members to 53 to hundreds and most recently to about 12,000



Three of the four founders of The Black Men's Locker are (L-R) Terry Terrill, Tyrice Lollis and Noris Henderson. (Not pictured: Marlon Tillmon.)

worldwide," Lollis said. "It just really went viral."

They monitor the membership carefully, making every effort to be sure that all members are real people and that the conversations are respectful.

"We keep the mess out. This is not a place to bring your negativity. It's a safe space to let down your guard, swallow your pride and ask for and receive the help you need," Terrell said.

In late February, the group staged the first of what they hope will become regular, in-person conferences with a three-day event at The Center in Wichita. They named it the "Rise of the 300 Men Conference," a nod to the gladiator movie "300: Rise of an Empire."

The first session focused on mental health, with about 60 men in attendance. Other sessions covered Black fatherhood, hypertension and other health issues that particularly affect Black men; financial issues and the importance of saving, planning and having life insurance; relationships; the need for community involvement; and the importance of voting.

All four co-founders, along with Iasis Center Senior Pastor William Vann, led a final-day discussion of relationships.

"All-in-all, we had about 74 men in attendance," Lollis said. "That's pretty good for a first-time conference. Now, we're starting planning for what we hope will be a fall

conference in Atlanta."

The overarching goal of the organization is to ensure that every Black man feels seen, heard and supported.

'You Don't Have to be What You've Been'

Terrell said it isn't easy for Black men to swallow their pride, even when they are struggling and know they need help.

"Black boys are taught from a young age that they have to be tough, be strong and never show weakness," he said. "They grow up hiding emotions, not working through them. Too often, they experience systemic racism, violence and trauma. It's hard to overcome that."

Henderson said they try to address issues that touch lives in the podcasts.

"We just did one on accountability last month. But that touches great subtopics like fatherhood, finances, career, and abuse. Sharing personal stories helps with the feelings of vulnerability," he said.

Measuring Success

The founders talked a little about how "The Black Men's Locker" will measure success.

The reward, Henderson said, will come in seeing how lives have been improved and knowing you had a role in making that happen. "There is no 'done,'" he said.

"I'll know I was successful when I see my children pick up the baton and continue working in this field," Lollis added.

MAY IS
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During this month, we address the challenges of the millions living with mental health conditions, especially those in the Black community.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, Black people are:

- Less likely to receive guideline-consistent care
- Less frequently included in research
- More likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists)

Despite the need, only **1 in 3** Black adults receives treatment.

It's time to change that. Small steps can lead to big progress in mental health.

Check out these resources to help change the narrative

Terrell agreed. "I want to be a sphere of influence that enables men to see that they have a choice to break the cycle. You don't have to forever be what you have been. And you don't have to become where you came from. You can choose to do something different. At one point in my life I was a real little knucklehead."

He said he also wants to help men understand that even if they have made mistakes, they can choose to be proud of the present rather than shamed by the past.

NONPROFIT, from Page 13 ↓

- A Support Bureau offers monthly support groups for Black men, women, LGBTQ members, and other intersectionalities.
- A Case Consult Bureau allows therapists to collaborate on difficult cases.
- A Supervision Bureau provides free mentorship to new Black practitioners.
- A Licensing Bureau assists with cultural competency in licensing exams for those seeking to become Black licensed therapy providers.
- A Youth Bureau focuses on the social-emotional well-being of school-aged youth.
- A Community Health Equity Bureau that focuses on health equity work by those working in and around mental wellness who aren't necessarily

practitioners. "Around town, we have events around a lot of different things, but not many events about mental health," says Waller. "Mental health is a touchy subject; that's why we've developed these bureaus, for people within our communities to start to talk about it."

Waller says that KCBMI can help start the conversation, bring down the cost of mental health care, and help add more Black mental health providers.

Wattree says their multi-pronged approach is to make the mental health space more accommodating for the Black community, both those seeking care and those who would like to provide care.

"There's a shortage of Black mental health practitioners so, hopefully, these efforts nurture and encourage the younger

generation to become therapists," says Waller.

Noting the scarcity of Black therapists in the area, KCBMI is working on a partnership with the nonprofit G.I.F.T. (Generating Income for Tomorrow) to provide resources like office space to help solo practitioners and small firms get established.

While still in its infancy, KCBMI has partnered with the Kansas City Municipal Court to provide services to defendants with unmet mental health needs. The group hopes to expand collaborations with schools, community organizations, and healthcare providers.

Those interested in supporting KCBMI's mission can join as a "Friend of the Initiative" to help promote awareness through networks and media engagement. For more info, visit KCBMI.org.

CULTURE, from Page 12 ↓

done," says Vang. "They are actually being well taken care of in that moment."

How to Find the Right Therapist

Cultural competence is important in a therapist but there are other considerations as well. To get the most out of mental health services you need to be sure that the provider can suit your needs.

"That journey of trying to find the right therapist that you can relate to and who you're comfortable with is really important," says Waller. "It's a necessary step for you to move forward in your mental health journey."

Be sure to check on costs, location for in-person meetings, if they are available virtually, and the provider's specialties. It's appropriate to ask your therapist questions beyond the logistics of fees and scheduling. Most therapists will offer a free or affordable consultation to see if you and the therapist are a match.

Here are some interview questions to consider when you attend your first session, if not before:

Questions to ask a potential therapist:

Have you ever had a patient with my background?

Are you knowledgeable about my culture and are you aware of

any biases or misconceptions you may have about it that could affect my treatment from you?

How have you handled clients who have had issues with racism, discrimination, homophobia, or religion?

Are you uncomfortable speaking about matters concerning race, sexuality, identity, or suicide?

Are you open to feedback?

What type of treatment or therapy do you provide?

What insurance do you accept? What are your payment plans?

No one therapist is perfect for everyone, and finding the right one is a personal choice.

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Help prevent an injury to your head. Wear a helmet for activities like biking, and wear a seatbelt. Protect yourself while playing sports. Do what you can to prevent falls, especially for older adults.



Be smoke-free

Quitting smoking can lower the risk of cognitive decline back to levels similar to those who have not smoked. It's never too late to stop.



Get moving

Engage in regular exercise. This includes activities that raise your heart rate and increase blood flow to the brain and body. Find ways to build more movement into your day — walking, dancing, gardening — whatever works for you!

Challenge your mind



Be curious. Put your brain to work and do something that is new or hard for you. Learn a new skill. Try something artistic. Challenging your mind may have short- and long-term benefits for your brain.



Control your blood pressure

Medications can help lower high blood pressure. And healthy habits like eating right and physical activity can help too. Work with a health care provider to control your blood pressure.



Manage diabetes

Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or controlled by healthier eating, increasing physical activity and medication, if necessary.



Sleep well

Good quality sleep is important for brain health. Stay off screens before bed and make your sleep space as comfortable as possible. Do all you can to minimize disruptions. If you have any sleep-related problems, such as sleep apnea, talk to a health care provider.



Stay in school

Education reduces your risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Encourage youth to stay in school and pursue the highest level of training possible. Continue your own education by taking a class at a local library, college or online.



Eat right

Eating healthier foods can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline. This includes more vegetables and leaner meats/proteins, along with foods that are less processed and lower in fat. Choose healthier meals and snacks that you enjoy and are available to you.



Maintain a healthy weight

Talk to your health care provider about the weight that is healthy for you. Other healthy habits on this list — eating right, physical activity and sleep — can help with maintaining a healthy weight.

Learn more at alz.org/healthyhabits.

Affordable Housing Program Targets City Core

Qualified buyers & rehabbers can get up to \$40,000 to buy or renovate homes.

Key Points:

- Wichita allocates \$5 million for the Affordable Housing Fund to address housing needs.
- Developers can apply for up to \$40,000 to purchase or renovate affordable homes.
- Priority goes for use with former public housing units, especially to clusters in Northeast and Southwest Wichita.

a pressing problem.

The money was allocated from the \$72 million provided to the city by the American Rescue Plan Act to help with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The housing crisis has deepened with the city selling 352 single family homes that have been part of their HUD Public Housing Program.

Part of what the Affordable Housing Fund provides is a way to ensure the new owners of those homes are low-income home buyers or landlords willing to keep them in the city's Section 8 voucher program.

"Some of the houses we are selling need a lot of work," said Megan Lovely, city communications manager. "Having a program that helps with money for renovations improves the odds that the house will be sold, repaired and kept as affordable housing."

She said the city decided to sell the homes as more and more of them fell into disrepair.

"The maintenance allocations from HUD just kept getting smaller and smaller as the need for repairs got bigger and bigger," she

said. "Something had to be done."

Top priority for AHF money goes to clusters of single family homes in two former public housing neighborhoods in Northeast and Southwest Wichita: 43 homes at 25th Street North along Minnesota, Ash and Piatt Streets, and 23 homes near Meridian and Pawnee, with the majority along Haskell and St. Clair Streets. Those 66 homes are the most recent homes approved for sale.

The next level of priority goes to any home from the public housing stock being sold by the city or located within a quarter-mile of radius of a former public housing unit.

Focusing the use of funds into targeted areas with a larger number of houses, the City believes they can more easily reach their goal of improving neighborhood stability, along with improving the quality of existing housing stock while expanding quality affordable housing options.

The city is advertising open houses on groups of homes as they are approved to be sold. So far the city has sold just 13 of the 352 homes. Eight more either have contracts or pending



A new City of Wichita fund awards up to \$40,000 to help buyers purchase or renovate affordable housing.

contracts. The listing price for the homes is the latest appraised value.

The \$5 million fund will allow for the purchase or upgrade of at least 125 homes.

AHF funds are only available to qualified developers or rehabbers. Applicants must show that they can:

- Do all the necessary work as well as prove they have past experience using local, state or federal funding
- Demonstrate a track record of efficiently completed housing rehab or new building projects
- Have honored or used all prior city funding
- Show the ability to complete projects in a timely manner with

a deadline of one year for rehab projects or 18 months for new construction

Units purchased and rehabilitated using money from the fund must be offered as affordable housing for low-to-moderate-income individuals and families.

Applications will be due in late June, and awards will be announced in late 2024 after being reviewed and scored by the Affordable Housing Review Board (AHRB) and then presented to Council for approval.

Since minority communities have been disproportionately impacted by housing insecurity, the city is focused on ensuring minority participation in this program as renters, owners,

developers and contractors. The AHRB will work to ensure minority developers and contractors can reasonably participate in the program. In addition, minority community leadership will be a part of a review to ensure the program's positive impact on minority communities.

More info is available at wichita.gov/282/Affordable-Housing-Fund. Applicants may request to be notified about the RFP, status updates and milestone events by emailing housingdevelopment@wichita.gov.

A directory of available homes being sold by the city can be found at www.wichita.gov/1317/Available-Housing-Department-Properties.

By P.J. Griekspoor
Wichita Reporter

Developers and remodelers can soon begin applying for up to \$40,000 per house in funding to purchase or renovate affordable homes in the city's core, with priority going to public housing units being sold by the City of Wichita.

The money will come from the \$5 million Affordable Housing Fund (AHF), which was created by the city council in April, after a series of public outreach meetings determined the growing shortage of affordable housing is

Meet New District 1 CSR Cameron Jackson

New District 1 community services representative joins staff of Atwater Neighborhood Resource Center.

By P.J. Griekspoor
Wichita Reporter

There's a new face in town you will likely encounter if you stop by the Atwater Neighborhood Resource Center looking for someone to talk to about a neighborhood issue.

Cameron Jackson is the new Wichita District 1 community services representative and has

an office at the center located at 2755 E. 19th St. N.

As liaison between citizens and District 1 Councilman Brandon Johnson, Jackson like other former District 1 CSRs will become a familiar face in the community.

The 25-year-old said he has been enjoying getting to know Wichita and the community and checking out the

culinary scene.

"I tried Meddy's and it's as good as I was told it would be," he said.

Jackson relocated from Houston for this position. There, he most recently served as assistant director for civic leadership at Rice University.

He attended Rice University and accepted a job there that involved teaching students how to

get more involved in the community.

"I decided I'd rather be involved in the community than teaching others how to be," he said. "So when I saw this job was available, I applied for this role."

Jackson said he's still settling into his new role.

"I arrived just before Tax Day," he said. "So my first several days were busy helping people with tax questions."

Jackson said he was a "military kid" who grew up "everywhere." Both of his parents served in the Army. Jackson is single, but he says "that's probably going to change soon."

Cameron Jackson, left, has joined the staff of the Atwater Neighborhood Resource Center. He is shown here with Councilman Brandon Johnson.



New \$7 Million Storytime Village Complex Breaks Ground

Project in Northeast Wichita will include restoration of two historic buildings, construction of new buildings & programming benefiting the Fairmount community.

By **P.J. Griekspoor**
Wichita Reporter

Key Points

- Storytime Village Literacy Center begins construction, will offer community programs and services.
- Project includes historical restoration and new construction, costing \$7 million.
- \$5 million grant jump-starts project, with a projected opening in fall 2025.

The wind died down, the rain stopped and the sunshine offered a glorious spring day to celebrate a decade-long dream beginning its journey to reality on April 29, with the ceremonial groundbreaking for the beginning of construction of the Storytime Village Literacy Center.

A project of Storytime Village, a 15-year-old nonprofit children's literacy program, the project will offer a variety of community-based services and serve as home to the Storytime Village organization.

The center's programs and activities include a licensed childcare center to support

access to quality care and educational programming for 50 children five years and under. It will provide broadband and computer access as well as classrooms, playgrounds, event spaces, and a teaching kitchen.

Preserving History

The new complex, which will be located just south of Wichita State University, will stretch along the north side of 16th Street from Holyoke to Fairmount.

The complex will encompass two large historical homes, both of which will be restored as part of the project, said Dr. Prisca Barnes, founder and CEO of Storytime Village. Holyoke Cottage, at 1704 N. Holyoke, was built in 1888 and was the first women's dormitory for Fairmount College, now WSU. The Fairmount President's Cottage, at 1717 N. Fairmount, was built the same year. Both are three-story Queen Anne-style homes listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Both will be completely restored.

New buildings, utilizing the historic architectural style will be constructed on the vacant lots between the two existing buildings.

Andy Buessing with Hutton Construction, designated construction company for the project, said the new construction will look like an "add-on" to the Holyoke Cottage.

The project is estimated to cost \$7 million to complete.

What had been a six-year dream for Barnes was jump-started in February when Storytime Village was awarded a \$5-million grant from the Kansas Capital Projects Fund.

Big Community Impact

Melissa Rooker, CEO of the Kansas Children's Cabinet, an organization pivotal to choosing Storytime Village as a grant



Hutton Construction released this rendering of the Storytime Village Literacy Center, with the existing and restored Holyoke Cottage (Left) anchoring the development.

recipient, told the groundbreaking celebrants that the support of the community was "key" in the award decision.

Barnes says she hopes to make the childcare center a hub to provide services for home-based daycare providers in the area. Wichita District 1 Councilman Brandon Johnson said the center will be "amazing for our young people and a blessing for so many" and said he is happy that the projected grand opening for the center in fall 2025 will be within his term in office.

"I look forward to ribbon-cutting," he said. "And I love seeing investment in District 1."

An Investment for The Community

There has been a lot of development in the area south of the WSU campus, thanks

See **New Complex** Page 23 →



The Rev. Wade Moore, board chair of Storytime Village, CEO Prisca Barnes, and Wichita Mayor Lily Wu ply their shovel

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Controversial KCK Public Works Director Resigns

After racial discrimination lawsuit & controversial comments on his podcast, Jeff Fisher seeks job in private sector.

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

Jeff Fisher, who served as the Wyandotte County/Kansas City, KS, United Government's public works director since 2016, has submitted his resignation.

Fisher told The Kansas City Star that he is pursuing a job in the private sector, but his tenure as public works director has been met with strong public criticism. More than a hundred signatures were added to a Change.org petition calling for his removal.

The Community Conscience Action Network, the group that posted the petition, cites several instances in which it feels that Wyandotte County residents have been "terrorized" by WYCO staff.

"Myself and two other women have personally experienced the harmful effects of racial discrimination and profiling by staff under the supervision of County Administrator David Johnston," reads the petition. "We opposed his [Jeff Fisher's] behavior of threatening violence to our community, suggesting violence towards our president, using vulgarities, and promoting hatred towards certain ethnicities. When we reported this to the administrator himself, he dismissed all our concerns."

Fisher made some of the comments that concerned members of the Community Conscious Action Network on the podcast he co-hosts with his son to promote their business, an outdoors-themed lifestyle brand.

Others on the podcast said things like, "Illegals should go back to where they came from because they are ruining the country," "Biden would be hung in the old days," and "There's



Jeff Fisher

going to be a civil war, and 'the sheep' don't have guns."

Fisher, for his part, said this about a potential civil war:

"These crazy ass people trying to change our country are delusional, and they've been getting away with it," said Fisher. "I'm really curious how long we're gonna let 'em get away with it. As soon as we stop putting up with it and really get serious, these f... they have no idea what's coming; we're the ones with all the weapons. It's gonna reach a point where we're gonna stand up and say enough is enough and go to really dramatic lengths to stop it."

After the petition was started, a racial discrimination lawsuit against the U.G. was settled. The lawsuit cited racism in the U.G. Public Works Dept., which Fisher ran. The UG agreed to pay \$650,000 to settle the racial discrimination lawsuit brought by Kenneth Mack, a Black former manager in public works. Mack said he witnessed racist patterns where he and other Black employees were passed over for jobs and promotions in public works.

Mack's lawsuit claimed that

See **FISHER**, Page 23 →

Kansas City Extends Free Bus Rides for Another Year, Future Changes Possible

Zero-fare is here to stay, but for how long?

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

Kansas City will keep its popular zero-fare bus system in place for at least another year after the City Council voted to renew its annual \$70.9 million contract with the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA).

However, the legislation also directs the City Manager to study the costs and benefits of shifting to an alternative "functional free fare" model, which could mean anything from reinstating fares for some riders in the future or handing out individual passes that are free, but that can be revoked.

Since early 2020, bus rides on KCATA's RideKC system within Kansas City have been completely free, making it the first major U.S. city to eliminate fares. The city has subsidized the program using transit tax revenue, but the KCATA faces a budget shortfall once federal pandemic relief funds run out next year.

"We really don't know what functionally free fare is right now," Councilmember Kevin O'Neill told The Kansas City Star. "And this will help us understand what that is so that when we are presented with it, we'll be able to make a decision."

A KCATA study found reinstating fares at 2019 levels of \$1.50 per ride could raise \$5.8 to \$7.1 million annually but reduce ridership by up to 33%. The agency has cited security issues caused by some riders staying on buses all day, but Councilmember Eric Bunch cautioned against "scapegoating" zero fare. Bunch noted that buses all over the country experience safety issues, even if a fare is charged.

Climate group Sunrise



Members of Sunrise Movement KC protest outside City Hall, demanding zero fare and better bus service.

Movement KC, which protested possible fare reinstatement, celebrated the extension by saying, "The people made it clear that we back zero-fare, and we forced them to listen!"

Proponents of a functional

free fare system argue that it could allow Kansas City to continue providing free rides for some socioeconomically disadvantaged residents meeting certain qualifications while others pay reduced or full fares to

increase revenue for improved service. The increased revenue could help the KCATA while they search for other funding sources, but they are projected to have a budget shortfall even if a full fare is reintroduced.





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WICHITA

Sat., May 4, 8 am - 12 pm: 2024 Wichita Area Skin Cancer Screening Clinic. KU School of Medicine, 1010 N. Kansas St. Have a spot on your skin that you're concerned about or maybe you've never had a skin check? If so, join us for our annual screening clinic where local dermatologists will provide skin cancer screenings. No appointment necessary. Screening open to all ages. FREE

Sun., May 5, 12 - 4 pm: Open Streets ICT, NoMar, 21st & Broadway. A full day of biking, fun physical activities, music, dancing, yoga, and much more. FREE

Mon., May 6, 9 am - 2:30 pm: DMV Driver's License Renewal; Dole VA Center, 5500 E. Kellogg. Veterans - renew your current Kansas ID or Driver's License; Help with replacing lost or stolen Kansas ID or Driver's Licenses, Get issued "Real ID" indicators; Help with suspended or revoked licenses, update address or legal name on your credentials, issue new credentials, or register to vote. FREE

Wed., May 8, 4 pm: W Community Impact Series: Vision Board. Commerce Club, 150 N Main. An experience designed to inspire, engage and connect emerging leaders with opportunities to make a tangible difference in our community. Guest speaker: V. Kaye Monk Morgan. FREE. Tickets at <https://bit.ly/3QoB3OG>.

Wed., May 8, 1 - 3 pm: Bingo Bash and Mother's Day Community Social Event. the Urban League located at 2418 E. 9th St. N. Light refreshments, bingo games with exciting prizes, and a fun-filled atmosphere to celebrate Mother's Day together. Bring your friends, and enjoy an afternoon of entertainment and celebration. FREE

Thu., May 9, 2 - 7:30 pm: National Civics Bee, Kansas Leadership Center, 325 E. Douglas. This event provides a platform for students to share ideas for enhancing their communities while demonstrating their civic knowledge. Cash prizes and recognition await the student winners. RSVP at <https://bit.ly/3UB4tvs>.

Fri., May 10, 6 pm: Cheese Johnson's UJUMP Junior Mentoring Program 3rd Annual Awards Ceremony, WSUTech National Center for Aviation Training, 4004 N. Webb Rd. Hors d'oeuvres, awards program, closing and photos. RSVP by April 26 to michelefittiero@devfinent.com.

Sat., May 11, 7 pm: Harmon's & Hollywood Presents: Honey We Shrunk Ourselves Tallgrass Film Association, 120 E 1st. Sequel to "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" picks up with an absent-minded scientist (Rick Moranis) whose troublesome invention accidentally shrinks him, his brother and their wives so effectively that their children think they've completely disappeared. Presented by Harmon's and Hollywood. \$10 <https://bit.ly/44rixer>

Tue., May 14, 10 am: Storytime in the Park, Naftzger Park, 601 E. Douglas. Read along

with stories on the big screen and enjoy music, snacks, free books and an activity for the kids. FREE

Tue., May 14, 5:30 - 6:30 pm: Homebuyer Information Series, Habitat for Humanity, 130 E. Murdock. Info session to learn about the guidelines and process for Habitat's affordable homeownership program. <https://bit.ly/44flrBX>

Thu., May 16, 5 pm: Rotary Club Classic Car Rally, Coleman parking lot, 250 N. St. Francis. An array of classic cars, live music, FREE Andy's Frozen Custard (while supplies last), plus Smokin' Diner food truck & the Shaken or Stirred popup bar. FREE

Fri., May 17, 10 am - 5 pm: PACT Act Spring Fling, Dole VA Center, 5500 E. Kellogg. PACT Act town hall, health care enrollment, disability claims processing, demonstrations of healthy cooking, info booths for VA services, health screenings. Free food begins at noon, until it's gone - courtesy of Wichita Wagonmasters. Have your DD-214 recorded with the Sedgwick County Register of Deeds, FREE service for our veterans and service members. Entertainment begins after 2 p.m.

KANSAS CITY

Thru May 11, 7:30 p.m. (Sunday 2 p.m.): Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Melting Pot Theater, 3051 Penn Valley Dr. An all-Black adaptation of Edward Albee's classic play, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," Albee's provocative look at love, marriage, and privilege challenges the thin line between love and hate. Performance are Thurs. thru Sunday. kcmeltingpot.com. \$27.50/\$23 for seniors.

Fri., May 10, 9 pm - 1 am: KC Tenants 5 year Party, The Ship, 1221 Union Ave. Party features dynamic DJs Skeem, Pat Nice, & Mike Scott in the All Else The Sea room and ShardaySpinzz in the Ship Lounge. COST \$15 <https://bit.ly/43Zoore>.

Sat., May 11, 11 am - 1:30 pm: Mothers Day Jazz Brunch. Buck O'Neill Education and Research Center, 1824 The Paseo. Live jazz music and delicious brunch offerings. Treat your mom to a special day out, where she can relax and enjoy music while indulging in a scrumptious meal. FREE. Donations welcome.

Sat., May 11, 8 pm: "Jazz & Jackie," Gem Theater, 1615 E. 18th. A musical salute to Jackie Robinson with guest Lala Hathaway. COST \$50+ <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/jazz-jackie-2024-tickets>.

Sat., May 11, 10 am: WeCode KC's Game Development from Scratch, 4825 Troost Ave. Students learn the beginning of game coding and development. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with game development, creativity, and team building. FREE. Register at <https://www.wecodekc.org/programs>.

Sat., May 11, 11 am - 1:30 pm: 2nd Annual Mental Health Awareness Brunch, Bruce

R. Watkins Cultural Center, 3700 Blue Pkwy. Mental health experts answer questions from guests relating to coping strategies, stigmas related to mental health and availability of care. COST \$10+ <https://bit.ly/3JFaG3o>.

Sat., May 11, 10 - 11:30 am: Kansas City Gangster Tour, Union Station, 30 W. Pershing. Grab your chopper, hop on the bus and you'll be immersed in a melodramatic look at mob homes and hangouts, turf wars and infamous crimes like the Union Station massacre. Tours board at Union Station's front entrance. COST \$35 <https://bit.ly/3QmDilO>.

Thu., May 16, 10 am - 12 pm: Trends in the Medicare Marketplace, CenterWell, 7527 State Ave. A class covering the current details of the Medicare market, statistics, and what's to come. FREE

Sat., May 18, 11 am - 10 pm: Black Expo. Kansas City Convention Center, 301 W. 13th. This event is a celebration of the achievements, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit of the Black community, offering attendees a unique opportunity to connect, learn, and grow. What to Expect: empowerment sessions, networking opportunities, business showcase, educational workshops, cultural celebration, food trucks. FREE

Sat., May 18, 10 am - 12 pm: WeCode KC Roblox Studio Classes (Age 12+ ONLY), 4825 Troost Ave. Learn how to create your own games, design unique worlds, and bring your imagination to life using Roblox Studio. FREE. Register at www.wecodekc.org/programs.

Sun., May 19, 3 pm - 12 am: The Black Business Ball & Honors, Kansas City Convention Center, The Grand Ballroom, 301 W. 13th St. Celebrating 12 Years of Advocating for Black Owned Businesses. An Ultra-Black Celebration of 11 Years of Serving the Black Business Community. Join us for a night of inspiration, entertainment and reflection. COST \$150+ <https://bit.ly/3U30EOo>.

Mon., May 20, 6:30 pm: Johnson County NAACP Executive Committee Meeting, Shawnee Church of the Nazarene, 5539 Quivira. FREE

Tue., May 21, 9 am - 3:30 pm: Project Homeless Connect, Gregg Klice Community Center, 1600 E. 17th Terr. Medical and immunizations, vision screening and prescription glasses, on-site dental services, Missouri birth certificates, housing, employment and education assistance, legal services, veteran services, family and child services, food assistance programs and more. Free lunch for participants. Free transportation shuttle available.

Sat., May 25, 1 - 3 pm: "Show Me Justice: Alvin Lee Sykes' Autobiography" Book Launch, Black Archives of Mid-America, 1722 E. 17th. "Show Me Justice" tracks the life and career of the late civil-rights advocate Alvin Lee Sykes, who used his self-taught legal knowledge to reopen the dormant murder case of Emmett

Till in the early 2000s. FREE

Wed., May 29, 5:30 - 7 pm: Free Beginner Genealogy Classes, Black Archives of Mid-America, 1722 E. 17th. Classes will be taught by staff from the Midwest Genealogical Center. FREE

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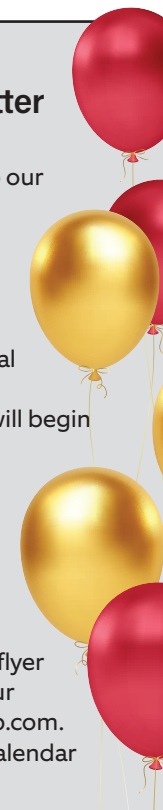
Wed., May 8, 7:30 pm: The Spinners Live, Historic Fox Theater, 18 E. 1st, Hutchinson, KS. The Spinners are one of the most iconic and enduring groups in R&B history. With a towering legacy spanning over six decades, Call 620-663-5861 for ticket info and cost \$53.50+.

Fri. May 17, 7 pm: The 70th Anniversary Brown Coalition Presents production of Now Let Me Fly, White Concert Hall, Washburn University campus, 1700 SW Jewell, Starring songstress Deborah Joy Winans of Winans family fame and Jason Dirden, actor from the hit OWN TV series GREENLEAF, along with Harvey Williams, an accomplished actor and founder of the KC Melting Pot Theatre, the play is a moving tribute to the significance of this landmark case and the fight for equality in education. Topeka, KS. FREE

Sat., May 18, 4 - 6 pm: 2nd Annual Bowling with the Buffalo Soldier SIGMAs Tournament. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, 834 Spruce St, Leavenworth, KS. Compete for the top prize while supporting a great cause. Don't miss out on this exciting event as we raise money for next year's high school seniors. You will receive 2 slices of pizza, a drink, and 2 hours of bowling. We will have 50/50 raffles, etc. COST \$30 <https://bit.ly/3xWUgAM>.

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Unsung Hero of KC BBQ: Bill Chaney Reflects on His Work

Chaney's pits are known for their unique flavor

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

Every night for the past month, Bill Chaney has been laying fire bricks for barbecue pits at an industrial scale. The struggles of trying to finish on time and coordinating his team of men may be stressful for some, but for Chaney, they are literal dreams.

Bill Chaney is 93 years old and built his last legendary barbecue pit years ago, but his mind is still on the job at night.

"I guess when people get older, their past comes to them when they're sleeping," says Chaney. "I just wake up smiling."

By many accounts, Chaney has built more barbecue pits than anyone in Kansas City. He built the famous brick pits at Jack Stack, Smoke Stack, Smokehouse, LC's, and Winslow's. He says he's nearly lost count of how many he's built over the years but puts the number around 30.

"I'd build more if I was able," says Chaney. "But the old man caught up with me."

Chaney's age may prevent him from building new pits, but technology has also changed. Most modern barbecue restaurants opt for what Chaney calls "barbecue ovens."

"A lot of new places work strictly out of [gas] smokers," says Josh Ghasemi, Smokehouse Barbecue director of operations. "We do it in a hickory pit, and we wouldn't have it if it weren't for Chaney; our business is built around that pit."

Chaney says the pits he built took three bricklayers 30 days to build. Many barbecue aficionados swear by Chaney's pits and say they can taste the difference.

"In the pits that I build, the grease drips and burns on the wood, putting that flavor back into the meat," says Chaney.

Humble Beginnings to BBQ Legend

Chaney was born in 1931 near Jefferson City and moved to Kansas City as a child. His father and grandfather were the first men he saw barbecuing by simply digging a hole in the ground.

At 12-years-old, Chaney, who says he grew up dirt poor, started working part-time washing dishes at Arthur Bryant's, perhaps KC's most legendary barbecue restaurant. He received a quarter an hour plus a sandwich a shift. Once a year for decades, Arthur Bryant's would close down for a week when Chaney would service and make repairs to their pit.

Out of school, Chaney began making a living as a shoemaker and general laborer. He struggled to get work because of his race, and because



Bill Chaney standing by the BBQ pit he built at Smokehouse Barbeque in KC's northland.

people assumed by his small stature that he wouldn't be very productive at hard labor.

"I got into making barbecue pits because I couldn't get hired anyplace else," says Chaney. "I'm just lucky that somebody took a liking to me and taught me."

Eventually, he found a few mentors who noted his hard work on odd jobs and brought him under their wing. Chaney eventually found

full-time work at Standard Improvement Company, a Kansas City construction firm. As fate would have it, he also just so happened to work with the two gentlemen who built the pit at Arthur Bryant's, who taught him the craft of building fireplaces then barbecue pits. He soaked in the information and learned how to design them, what bricks and

See **BBQ BILL**, Page 23 →

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Rock Island Bridge: A Unique Entertainment Space Hopes to Open This Summer

Over-water entertainment space bridges KCMO's West Bottoms with KCK's Armourdale District.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

The Rock Island Bridge is nearing a reveal as the first-ever bridge entertainment district. The project sits over the Kansas River and connects Missouri and Kansas between the West Bottoms on the Missouri side and Kansas City, KS, Armourdale District.

The project takes the abandoned railroad bridge built in 1908 and turns it into a one-of-a-kind experience blending history, innovation, and community engagement. The 700-foot-long bridge is being built out to include 35,000 sq. ft of space designed to provide an enjoyable and leisure encounter with the area's waterway.

If you're not sure where the bridge is located, head to the West Bottoms and you can find it near HyVee Arena. Access on the KCK side is in an industrial area but will include great parking access right at the edge of the bridge.

The bridge is owned by the Unified Government of KCK and Wyandotte County, however, the unique project is spearheaded by developer Flying Truss LLC, which will pay rent to the U.G. for use of the bridge.

"This is a public, private, philanthropic partnership," says Mike Laddin, CFO of Flying Truss. "That's three sectors coming together to accomplish what couldn't be done alone: creating a first-in-the-world entertainment venue and public park on a bridge over a river."



The Rock Island Bridge, connecting Missouri and Kansas, is set to transform into a unique entertainment space this summer, featuring dining, events, and scenic views. Delays have pushed the opening to later into summer, with free timed tickets for a staggered visitor welcome.

Rolling Open this Summer

Scheduled for a "rolling open" this summer, according to their website, the Rock Island Bridge is slated to welcome visitors with free timed tickets starting in late June and early July. The staggered approach aims to manage the anticipated initial influx of guests safely.

Initially slated for a March opening, delays in construction, including safety improvements requested by the city, pushed back the timeline.

In a preview of the space given to The Voice, the delays in progress were noteworthy, with plywood lining the ground and a need for rapid construction to complete the project on their current timeline.

The bridge's extensive remodel includes raising the bottom deck by four feet to mitigate flooding risks. Construction improvements also included widening portions of the bridge.

What to Expect

Upon opening, guests can explore the two-story structure, which offers a range of amenities and experiences. The lower level features seating, restrooms, a restaurant-style area serving elevated street food, and various vendors. Meanwhile, the upper level serves as a versatile event space with a

bar, stage, and retractable ceilings for year-round functionality.

The Rock Island Bridge will operate seven days a week, accommodating public access and private events. While visitors can enjoy pedestrian crossings and scenic views, cyclists will be asked to dismount their bikes for safety. Private security will be on-site to ensure a pleasant and secure experience for all.

Developers are seeking a "common consumption area" on the bridge to allow visitors to purchase alcoholic beverages and mill about the entire space. However, Rock Island Bridge is expected to close at 10 p.m. during the week and no later than midnight on weekends, as developers are hoping for a family-friendly environment.

Flying Truss also plans to have guest retail events like farmers' markets, outdoor yoga classes, makers' fairs, and seasonal events like Christmas markets.

Opening 'Soon'

The interest in the upper deck for private events is reportedly already high, indicating strong community engagement. Bookings for private events are already underway.

As anticipation mounts, officials remain tight-lipped about the exact opening date, promising only "this summer."

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New Complex, from Page 18 ↓

to the areas designation as an Opportunity Zone, a federal program to encourage development in low-income communities as a way to spur economic growth and job creation. Up until now, most of the development in the area had been designed to support WSU.

Barnes, who had been watching this development, wanted to build a project in the area that would take advantage of the Opportunity Zone designation but also benefited residents of the Fairmount community.

"It sort of opened up a new thought process and I realized that Storytime Village had to own this land so we can benefit from things like historic restoration tax credits and leasing space to partners who would offer services important to university students and the greater Fairmount community," said Barnes.

Services to the Community

Barnes hopes to make the childcare center a hub to serve the home-based daycare providers who provide the bulk of care in the neighborhood.

She envisions a restored

Fairmount President's Cottage that can be a residency for researchers and authors, who can stay there and be accessible to offer "fireside chats" in the living room to share their discoveries with WSU students or interested community members.

Plans are to partner with the Workforce Alliance to offer job search help, a branch library where people can check out books, and a book-sharing center where educational materials can be stored, sorted and distributed.

Barnes said she will work with the community to

determine ways the center can be used to provide solutions for the community.

In her celebratory remarks, she quoted an African proverb that advises, "If you want to go far, go together," urging the community to participate in the development.

"We will take time for listening, gathering feedback and establishing partnerships with as many people as we can," said Barnes. "We can have workshops and talk about the problems. But we also have to be the solution. This is our opportunity. If we fail, I know we at least tried."

FISHER, from Page 19 ↓

he was called the N-word at a company Christmas party 20 years ago, and the person was asked to leave but was not disciplined. Mack's suit also says that Fisher made Mack apply

for a position that he held for 16 years. The lawsuit said that Fisher "fostered a toxic work environment" and that nothing was done when Mack complained to then-County Administrator Doug Bach. Fisher then called Mack and

angrily cursed him out.

Since Mack resigned in 2022, there have been no management-level Black employees in the U.G. Public Works Dept.

Fisher will continue to lead the public works

department through May 10. County Administrator David Johnston said in a written statement that U.G. leadership had received Fisher's resignation letter. "We wish him the best in his endeavors," said Johnston.

BBQ BILL, from Page 21 ↓

techniques to use. This skill became Chaney's calling card, as he perfected his craft over decades.

The History of Burnt Ends

He says that when he worked at Arthur Bryant's, the brick pit got so hot that the pitmaster would have to throw water on the fire and move meat to prevent it from becoming too charred. This process was only so successful, and brisket would get burned around the edges. The crisp edges were then given away, and eventually, the burnt bits became popular enough to be put on the menu as "scraps and fries." These scraps were such a hit that they got a new name: burnt ends. Nowadays, burnt ends are the signature dish of KC barbecue.

An In Demand Pit Builder

At first, Chaney's pits weren't for commercial use. The first one was for a church in Harrisonville, and he made

a few for individuals, including local baseball player and World Series hero Joe Carter.

Chaney met Carter through a personal friend and neighbor in Kansas City's Santa Fe neighborhood: Satchel Paige. Chaney recalls fondly that the retired Major League ballplayer was a big storyteller and had a bumper sticker on his car reading, "Don't look back. Something might be catching up with you."

The first restaurant-build for Chaney was in 1957 for Russ Fiorella and his first barbecue joint, Smoke Stack BBQ. Chaney also built a pit for Fiorella's son Jack for the original Jack Stack restaurant in Martin City around 1974.

Chaney maintained a relationship with the Fiorella family. As their restaurant business grew in size and number, Chaney came back again and again to build and service their pits. Today, Jack Stack in Martin City has been rated as one of the top restaurants in the country and ships its barbecue nationwide. The

last pit that Chaney built was around 2000, for Jack Stack's Freight House location in the Crossroads Art District.

"I built the pit, and then they built the restaurant around it," says Chaney.

While Chaney has outlived many of the restaurants he built pits for, here are the locations you can still visit:

Fiorella's Jack Stack Barbecue:

13441 Holmes Road, Kansas City
13645 Holmes Road, Kansas

City
101 W. 22nd St. #300, Kansas City
4747 Wyandotte St., Kansas City
9520 Metcalf Ave., Overland Park

LC's Bar-B-Q,

5800 Blue Parkway, Kansas City

Smokehouse Barbecue:

6304 N. Oak Trafficway, Gladstone
19000 E. 39th St., Independence



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IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION FOR PARENTING PLAN,
RESIDENTIAL SCHEDULE AND/OR CHILD SUPPORT OF
CHILDREN: ANTONY BRIAN BRACAMONTES OLVERA

Karen Lilian Olvera Manjaraz (Petitioner)

and

Alfonso Bracamontes Alvarez (Respondent)

Case No. 2230152506

PURSUANT TO PETITION FOR PARENTING PLAN, RESIDENTIAL
SCHEDULE AND/OR CHILD SUPPORT YOU ARE HEREBY

NOTIFIED that a petition has been filed in the Superior Court of Washington, County of Clark by Petitioner asking for a parenting plan, residential schedule and/or child support, and you are hereby required to plead to such petition on or before the 19th day of June, 2024, in said court at Superior Court of Washington, Clark County, 1200 Franklin St., Vancouver Washington.

Should you fail therein, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon said petition.

Karen Lilian Olvera Manjaraz
Petitioner

Alsr. Alfonso Bracamontes Alvarez Para informarle por este Medio Que Karon Lilian Olvera Manjaraz que ella estapidiendo la custodia de su hijo Anthony Brian Bracamontes Olvera i tiene Un caso en la corte y el vive wichita Kansas Sialgien Loconose un familiar o amigo Selo agan savor que tiene un caso en la corte por su hijo que vive en Vancouver, WA

Alsr. Alfonso Bracamontes Alvarez To inform you by this means that Karon Lilian Olvera Manjaraz that she is asking for custody of her son Anthony Brian Bracamontes Olvera i has a case in court and he lives in Wichita Kansas if he knows a family member or friend who knows that he has a case in court for his son who lives in Vancouver WA

Tax/Assurance Associate:

Gains understanding of clients' needs & expectations, their business & industry, maintains client relationships • Assists in planning & conducting the audit, review & compilation tasks • Assesses risks & evaluates the client internal control structures • Assists in preparing engagement reports of findings & recommendations • Plans & performs corporate, S-corp., partnership, individual, & state & local tax compliance engagements • Prepares & reviews quarterly & annual income tax provisions as well as identifies & documents uncertain tax positions • Performs tech. research, analysis, & written memoranda • Prepares client depreciation schedules • Prepares trial balances from client info along w/ providing adjusting journal entries for clients.

Req: Bach. degree in accounting or related field & year of related exp.; Also req. CPA or eligibility for CPA; proficiency in Word, Excel, Outlook, & data manipulation.

Some travel to client locations may be required (less than 1x/month). Any suitable combination of education, training, or experience is acceptable.

Resume to and job location:
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301 N. Main, Ste. 1700
Wichita, KS 67202; aghlc.com.

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