



WICHITA CORPORATE



**LaShonda
Garnes**

**John
Rolfe**

**Bradley
Dyer, Jr**

Moji Rosson

Ricki Ellison

STANDOUTS

A 2024 Supplement to **THE VOICE**

Ron Holt: Wichita's Black Corporate Trailblazer

He started as a meter reader and rose to chairman and CEO of the power company. He's the only African American to ever reach that rank in Wichita. He shares his story and what he says was the secret to his unmatched success.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor, In Chief

Luck, hard work or connections?

Our corporate standouts say it takes all three to make it up the corporate ladder, with each of them leaning heavily on one over the other.

For Ron Holt, it's all about connections, or relationships, as he prefers to call it.

At the end of 2001, Holt retired as CEO of Kansas Gas & Electric, after joining the company in 1970 as a meter reader. Holt, who is known for his strong management and organizational skills, says hard work is important, but he says the "extra" came from building strong relationships.

Holt's Beginning

If you live in Northeast Wichita, you probably know a member of the Holt family. Ron was one of 10 Holt children, and generations of their family who still reside here.

The family was from Lockesberg, AR, where Ron was born in 1946. The

family moved to Wichita when Ron was in 2nd grade, but life with nine siblings and two parents in a three-bedroom house made Ron decide to move back to Arkansas where he was raised by his maternal grandparents.

It was the South in the '50s and racism, Jim Crowism and segregation were the norm. While he lived in a house that didn't have running water, which required treks to the out-house, and he attended and graduated from a segregated school system, he credits his early upbringing and grandfather for helping shape his life.

Even as an African American male in the south in the 1950s and 60s, his grandfather was highly respected in the community.

"He was independent and he worked hard, but he survived by building relationships and gaining respect," says Holt.

It's a model Ron followed as he grew his career.

Back to Wichita

After graduating high school in 1964, he moved

back to Wichita, and after three semesters at Wichita State University – where he admits he didn't apply himself – he took a job at Boeing. However, it was the height of the Vietnam War and, fearing he was going to be drafted, he joined the Kansas Army Guard. Eventually, his unit was activated and he was shipped to Fort Carson, CO, for training.

At that time, the military had a rule that they wouldn't send two males from a family into a war zone at the same time. Ron's brother Roger was already in Vietnam, so Ron spent the full 18 months of his activation at Fort Carson.

He returned to Wichita in 1969 – he was married to wife Karen, had three children and, due to an economic downturn, Boeing wouldn't hire him back. He took a job at Macy's but knew that was not enough to maintain a family of five.

Two months later, he received a call from Walt Nelson, a person he'd served with in the Kansas Guard. Nelson worked in the personnel department for Kansas Gas & Electric and suggested Ron apply for a job.

Ron put in an application and two months later received a call from Walt offering him a job as a meter reader. It was the first example of relationships playing a role in Holt's career. While their shared military experience was the connection, it was what Walt saw in Ron – his work ethic, intelligence, strong character – that made him reach out to Ron for what would prove to be a pivotal turning point

for Ron and for KG&E.

It was the early 1970s and Wichita's business environment was still very segregated. There were definitely Black jobs, and, up until the time they hired Ron, meter reader hadn't been one of them. Prior to hiring Ron, the only positions held by Blacks at KG&E were janitors.

On the Way Up

Thanks to the flexibility of his meter reading job and a subsequent job at the company working third shift in the company's customer call center, Ron was able to use his G.I. Bill to complete his college degree while working full time.

Ron was about to complete his degree in business at Friends University when his friend Walt reached out to him and asked him to apply for a position in the Personnel Department.

As an Employment Specialist, his job in personnel was hiring and recruiting and helping the company reach its new Equal Employment Opportunity goals.

Although he wasn't in a position to hire, Ron says his goal was always to make sure that when he sent candidates for hiring to a department, that it was a minority candidate the bosses would have a hard time saying no to.

"I didn't try to keep track, but one of the greatest rewards of working there was having the opportunity to give people a chance to get their foot in the door," says Holt.

The company's target was to match the minority population of the community,



Please complete the following sentences

Be open to ... constructive criticism and use the feedback to learn and grow

As a kid I wanted to be ... a cowboy (maybe because I loved watching "The Lone Ranger" on TV).

In five years, I'll be ... spending more time traveling to the northwest and northeast parts of the United States.

Wichita or Kansas needs more ... diversified economy that offers more opportunities for young professionals.

I've been known to binge watch ... doesn't apply to me, unless you consider watching all of the college and NFL football games on a weekend.

around 12% to 13%. Under his watch, they got close.

Community Engagement

It was in Personnel that Holt was introduced to involvement and service in the community. Not long after he hired into the Personnel Department, the vice president of human resources called him into the office and told him he wanted him, like others in

the department, to get involved in the community.

The vice president understood that having a strong city was good for the electric company. As the community grew, so would the electric company. So he encouraged, almost demanded, that professionals in his department

See **TRAILBLAZER**
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Ron's Current Board & Civic Organizations

- Board Chair, Kansas Leadership Center
- Board Member, Go Wichita Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Board Member, The Kansas African American Museum
- Board Member, Wichita Area Technical College Foundation
- Board Member, Sedgwick County Zoological Society
- Board Member, Exploration Place
- Community Board Member, Commerce Bank, Wichita
- Member, National Advisory Council, WSU
- Member, City Manager's Grievance Board, City of Wichita
- Member, Wichita State University College of Education Advisory Board
- Member, Alpha Nu Boule, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity

Senior Business Development Officer
Credit Union of America

BRADLEY DYER JR.



At Credit Union of America, Bradley Dyer is responsible for all the education and healthcare partnerships with the credit union, including onboarding new relationships and maintaining existing ones. His role runs the gamut from strategy to execution.

Bradley, originally from Portmore, Jamaica, is married to Natasha Denise Dyer and they have one son, Bradley Dyer III.

Share a piece of wisdom you received or learned that substantially changed your work-related path.

I've learned that it's critical to do self-evaluations and be honest with yourself. If you are honest with yourself, it's easier to acknowledge your flaws, and that in turn makes room for you to improve yourself. It also allows you to grow and build on your strengths and successes.

Most paths up the corporate ladder aren't straight paths. What are some of the criteria you consider when making a career move?

I always try to give serious consideration to whether or not I can add value to whatever I'm involved in. Sometimes, it's important just to be present, but I would prefer to be present and involved, even if in a small way, as long as it adds value and helps the organization move forward.

Luck, hard work, or

connections?

Luck or good fortune, and hard work are the primary drivers for me personally. Connections are an important part of advancement in the workplace, but I didn't know anyone when I moved to Wichita, so there were no connections. So, in my personal story connections did not play a role for me in Wichita.

What advice would you give a young professional starting out on their career?

Understand and accept that it's never going to be a straight, smooth and narrow path. Accepting or preparing for challenges will help you manage tumultuous times. Stay focused, don't always react emotionally, and believe in yourself and your abilities.

What organizations and in which ways do you give back to the community?

Board Member for the United Way of the Plains
Advisory committee for Advance Kansas

Education committee for League 42 baseball
Kansas Credit Union Council

Volunteer with Credit Union of America's volunteer arm, called CU In Action

Former Board Member for the Pando Initiative

How do you balance work and life for the greatest amount of fulfillment?

I have a great spouse who is intentional about getting us out of the house on trips as a family, and we make great



If you are honest with yourself, it's easier to acknowledge your flaws... and make room for you to improve..."

BRADLEY DYER JR.

memories when we do that, but I am also intentional about not going anywhere and being at home with my family. That is also of high value.

Complete the following sentences:

Be open to ... critique.
As a kid I wanted to be ... An entertainer.

In five years I'll be ... Not sure, but I hope I am happy and fulfilled.

Wichita or Kansas needs ... Bold forward thinkers.

I've been known to binge watch ... Netflix shows and the news.

What do you do for fun?

Hang out with my family, watch Netflix shows.

Director for Talent,
Workforce Development, and
Community Engagement
Greater Wichita Partnership

RICKI ELLISON



In her job, Ricki Ellison works to align organizations' talent strategies with business goals, ensuring that the local workforce is equipped with the right skills, engaged, and connected with the community to contribute to its regional economic growth and success.

Ricki, a Wichita native, is married to Kyle Ellison and they have one daughter, Paris.

Share a piece of wisdom you received or learned that substantially changed your work-related path.

Embrace the power of your lived and unique perspective. As a Black woman from the Midwest, my experiences are a rich blend of resilience, adaptability, and insight. The advice I received was to use those experiences to your benefit. Lead confidently in the space you lead, speak up when you know something is wrong, and do your research to inform your decisions.

What are some of the criteria you consider when making a career move?

I look at how the change will impact my overall life. I consider all aspects of the transition — whether it's a new job, joining a board, adopting a new hobby, or learning a new skill — to understand its true ability to integrate into my current life. This approach helps me prioritize and make necessary adjustments to create space for new opportunities. It also allows me to reflect on my current commitments, ensuring they align with my personal and professional goals. By taking stock of what

I'm doing now, I can make informed decisions that support my growth and well-being.

Luck, hard work, or connections?

All three have played a significant role in my career journey. For me, it boils down to: hard work builds credibility, connections create access, and luck can turn effort into opportunity. My dad always says, "I would rather be lucky than good any day."

What advice would you give a young professional starting out on their career?

My advice is to work on your mental outlook because your perspective can make all the difference. It's tough to spot opportunities when your view is blocked by doubt or negativity. Building mental strength will carry you through whatever comes your way. Focus on keeping your mental game strong — it's something that'll serve you well, not just in your career but in life.

What organizations and in which ways do you give back to the community?

Ricki currently serves on the United Way of the Plains Board of Directors, Wichita Festivals Board of Directors, Steve Clark YMCA Board of Directors, and LGBT Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and is a member of the City of Wichita Arts and Culture Taskforce.

Complete the following sentences:

Be open to ... uncomfortable



My advice is to work on your mental outlook...It's tough to spot opportunities when your view blocked by doubt or negativity."

RICKI ELLISON

experiences.

As a kid I wanted to be ... Professional bowler or game show host.

In five years I'll be ... Ordering another pair of prescription eye glasses.

Wichita or Kansas needs ... To take more risks. We are a great community that just needs to know and believe how amazing and smart we are. We are true problem solvers in the Midwest.

I've been known to binge watch ... "Love is Blind" on Netflix.

What do you do for fun?

For fun I love to travel, work out, eat and go on adventures with my family and friends.



Greater Wichita
Partnership

CONGRATULATIONS

to our Corporate Standout

RICKI ELLISON

Director of Talent, Workforce Development,
and Community Engagement

greaterwichtapartnership.org

Making a difference in our community.

Congratulations to Bradley and all the Corporate Standout honorees. We appreciate your commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. Thank you from Credit Union of America.

Bradley Dyer Jr.
Senior Business
Development Officer
Credit Union of America





Congratulations Corporate Standout

Moji Rosson exemplifies our mission to improve the lives of our members and the communities we serve. Not only does she lead Meritrust's strategic partnerships and community initiatives, Moji lends her time and talent to several boards and organizations making a positive impact on others. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!

MOJI ROSSON

Director of Growth Strategies
and Community Impact



TRAILBLAZER

At Fidelity Bank, our pathway to a more inclusive, equitable and diverse culture is being crafted under the thoughtful leadership of LaShonda Garnes—a lifelong advocate for equality, dedicated to ensuring that all voices are heard and each individual feels valued.

Congratulations for being recognized as a Corporate Standout, LaShonda—your Fidelity family is so proud of all you've accomplished, moving our company and community

BRAVELY ONWARD.®



Fidelity
BANK



Director of Growth Strategies
and Community Impact
Meritrust Credit Union

MOJI ROSSON



In her current role, Moji Rossion oversees Meritrust Credit Union's business development, strategic partnerships, field of membership, community sponsorships, corporate donations, governmental affairs, and assists with consumer deposit growth strategies and brand equity initiatives.

A Wichita native, she and her husband Shane have two children: Grace, 5, and Bella, 4.

Share a piece of wisdom you received or learned that substantially changed your work-related path.

I've learned that one of the differences between people that are stagnant and successful people is the ability to take constructive criticism and apply it to future situations. It's important to have a growth mindset and embrace challenges and feedback as opportunities for improvement. You should put consistent effort into expanding and improving all your talents, gifts, and skills.

Most paths up the corporate ladder aren't straight paths. What are some of the criteria you consider when making a career move?

I try to assess the overall opportunity. Will this move make me a more complete individual? Will it improve my overall marketability? Will this allow me to learn new things and gain new skills? What is the growth potential? It's always about growing your skillset so you can show you're capable

of adding value in any situation.

Luck, hard work, or connections?

Instead of "luck," I believe in blessings and divine intervention, which have definitely had their place in my career. The only reason I was able to realize those blessings was due to my hard work and perseverance. "Complacency is the enemy of success." It's important to always strive for more. Connections are also important. Sometimes opportunity comes based on who you know, not just what you know. So be open to meeting a wide array of people and be strategic in building your network.

What advice would you give a young professional starting out on their career?

Be resilient. To quote the great scholar, Dr. Seuss, "I'm sorry to say so but, sadly, it's true that bang-ups and hang-ups can happen to you ... So be sure when you step, step with care and great tact. And remember that life's A Great Balancing Act. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed!" This is from the book, "Oh the Places You'll Go!" I read it to my kids often.

In what organizations and in which ways do you give back to the community?

I am a current board member for the United Way of the Plains, The Kansas African-American Museum, Empower, and Envision,



It's always about growing your skillset so you can show you're capable of adding value in any situation."

MOJI ROSSON



Inc. I am also active with the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, holding membership on their Government Relations and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committees.

Please complete the following sentences:

Be open to ... feedback.
As a kid, I wanted to be ...
An attorney.

In five years I'll be ...
Living my best life.

Wichita or Kansas needs ...
To stop being afraid of change.

I've been known to binge-watch ... "Real Housewives (Potomac, Atlanta, New Jersey, Dubai, and Salt Lake City)."

What do you do for fun? Be a mom and wife.

Senior Vice President
Director of Inclusion, Equity and Diversity
Fidelity Bank

LASHONDA GARNES



LaShonda Garnes, a Chicago native, is a Senior Vice President, Director of Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity at Fidelity Bank.

LaShonda is the mother of three children: Bria, Briaja, and Trinton and her first grandchild, grandson Nico Elle.

LaShonda leads the long-term planning and execution of Fidelity Bank's enterprise-wide effort to foster a culture of inclusion. Her department is part of the bank's Office of Culture and Talent, a division that seeks to align the experiences of customers and employees with the bank's mission, vision and values.

Share a piece of wisdom you received or learned that substantially changed your work-related path.

Progress is always better than perfection. Striving for perfection often leads to disappointment, stagnation, burnout, and missed opportunities. When I accepted that perfection wasn't the goal and learned how to give grace to myself and others, I became a more effective and well-rounded leader. This mindset has allowed me to take on challenging assignments, learn from others, and welcome constructive criticism.

Most paths up the corporate ladder aren't straight paths. What are some of the criteria you consider when making a career move?

I always assess how the position aligns with my purpose, values, and potential for both my personal and professional

growth. I evaluate the organizational culture and reflect on how the position supports the greater good and enhances the organization's mission. This process helps me determine whether I can make a meaningful impact by stepping into the role.

Luck, hard work, or connections?

Hard work has been the cornerstone of my career. The three elements – hard work, relationships, and timing (luck) are deeply connected. Hard work lays the foundation, relationships open doors, and timing (luck) often determines when opportunities arise, especially the unexpected ones.

What advice would you give a young professional starting out on their career?

It's crucial to approach your career with an open mind, a growth mindset, and the willingness to flex your agility muscle. Be open to diverse perspectives, and remember that your journey is uniquely yours – it may not be a straight line but one full of twists and turns. Regardless of the path, embrace the ride, remain self-reflective, and recognize there's a lesson in every experience. Stay curious, nurture relationships, and practice patience and persistence. Career success rarely happens overnight.

In what organizations and in which ways do you give back to the community?

Wichita Community Foundation Board Member



Progress is always better than perfection."

LASHONDA GARNES



and Board Secretary
Newman University Board of Trustee

Wichita Habitat for Humanity Board Member
Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

Chamber Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

Complete the following sentences:

Be open to ... constructive feedback and different perspectives.

As a kid I wanted to be ... a teacher and an accountant.

In five years I'll be ... a doctoral graduate from WSU.

Wichita or Kansas needs ... a grocery store in downtown Wichita.

I've been known to binge watch ... "Scandal."

What do you do for fun?

I enjoy spending time with friends and family, and snuggling with my first grandson, Nico Elle. When not hanging out with family and friends, I enjoy traveling and experiencing new things and creating memories.

President & CEO
Wichita Regional
Chamber of Commerce

JOHN ROLFE



John Rolfe is the President & CEO of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. He supervises a team of 25 employees and his responsibilities are leading the chamber's team and its strategic initiatives to create a positive economic impact and advocate on behalf of Wichita's regional businesses and the chamber's 1,400 members.

John is married to local KWCH TV anchor Felicia Rolfe and they have two daughters: Evan Rolfe, 2024 college graduate from Loyola University – New Orleans, and Erin Rolfe, college freshman at Indiana University.

Prior to joining the Chamber, he served as the

Chief Business Officer at the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), where he directed all business operations, business development and community outreach efforts. Before joining KLC, John served as Chief Operating Officer for Houston First Corporation, Houston, TX and was the CEO and President of Go Wichita Convention and Visitors Bureau. He has also served as Deputy Secretary of the Kansas Department of Commerce.

Share a piece of wisdom you received or learned that substantially changed your work-related path.

Do things with a sense of excellence and urgency. This

was shared with me at an early stage in my professional career and has been very valuable. We should always strive for excellence in everything that we do and do it with a sense of urgency instead of procrastination.

The difference between "Ordinary" and "Extraordinary" is a little "Extra." We should always strive to give a "WOW" factor. This can often be achieved by doing a little extra and creating an extraordinary experience.

What are some of the criteria you consider when making a career move?

There are several criteria that I consider. However, a



Take your first job for the experience, not for the money."

JOHN ROLFE

few of those that are most important are that I will have enjoyment in my career, that the opportunity for continued growth exists and that my leadership abilities can be utilized and be a valuable contribution.

Luck, hard work, or connections?

All three factors have had an influence in getting me to where I am today. Luck, by being in places where opportunities were presented. Hard work by preparing myself and being prepared for when

a new opportunity became available or one that I wanted to pursue. Connections by building relationships with people from all walks of life.

What advice would you give a young professional starting out on their career?

I always enjoy sharing advice with our young professionals as I have been given some great advice, both personally and professionally. A few that I have found to be of value have been:

Take your first job for the experience, not for the money. Learn all aspects of the company that are available, whether you get paid for the extra learning or not, as it will be of value to you at some point. Always come prepared and have a positive attitude. "It's not your aptitude but your attitude that will determine your altitude in life."

In what organizations and in which ways do you give back to the community?

I served on multiple boards to give back to the community. A few are:

The Kansas African

American Museum
Sigma Pi Phi
The Gathering
Wichita State University Foundation and Alumni Engagement, Barton School of Dean's Advisory Board, SPERO Committee
Wichita Collegiate School Board

Please complete the following sentences:

Be open to... listening to others whose thoughts and ideas may be different than yours.

As a kid I wanted to be... Pediatrician

In five years, I'll be... continuing to live the best days of my life.

Wichita or Kansas needs... to be prouder and more boastful of what we have and what we offer to the world.

I've been known to binge watch... Family Feud

What do you do for fun?

I enjoy dining out, trying new restaurants, having a great workout and spending time with family and friends.

TRAILBLAZER, from Page 10 ↓

designed to help strengthen the community.

Ron was given a great deal of flexibility to attend community meetings during business hours, but he was still expected to get his job done.

His first involvement was with the United Way. On that board was an executive from Union Bank, one from Beechcraft, and others. As a young Black man in his late 20s and first level professional in Personnel, he was being introduced to some of the city's most powerful movers and shakers.

Within a year, he was recruited to serve on the board of the Red Cross.

"The unfortunate part about it was that these

nonprofit organizations wanted people of color and there weren't many people to draw from," said Holt. "So I was kind of being pulled in two directions. Those, I got to do for the company, and I liked doing them, but the lead part was the company."

The other pull was to organizations he had a personal interest in, like The Boys and Girls Club, the Urban League and Big Brothers and Big Sisters. He always made sure to keep some of these projects on his list, often bringing the support of KG&E with him.

From two boards, two dozens of community activities including board memberships, commission and special project committees, Ron Holt became a "go-to" person of influence in Wichita.

Luck, Hard Work or Relationship?

As Ron's involvement in the community grew, so did his role at KG&E (which along with Kansas Power & Light of Topeka were purchased by Western Resources, later named Westar, and now Evergy). He moved up steadily in the company. In 1992, when KG&E was purchased and the company was reorganized, Ron became Director of Community Services. He was the perfect fit for this job that worked to continue the company's involvement in the Wichita community.

He led that department until 2000 when he was appointed chairman of the board and president of KG&E. He retired from the company in 2002 and a few months later joined Sedgwick County as

one of the government's leading administrators.

It was a stellar career unmatched by any other African American in Wichita, and by very few – if at all – of any race. In addition to hard work and strong ethical standards, Ron credits relationship building as the number one influencer in his career success.

He says where a number of people fall short is in not building relationships.

"In that comes trust. You build respect from people in the community," said Holt. "Initially, they respected me because I came with KG&E's money and if KG&E was trusting me to be there, people saw me as KG&E."

His outside respect helped grow his respect inside KG&E and Ron's growing respect

in the community began to prove beneficial for KG&E.

He says where a number of people fall short is in not building relationships.

"It builds trust," he says, and trust in the right places can help build success.

Benefits Others

Not to be overlooked, is the benefit of having a person like Ron in the many rooms when major decisions were being made about the Wichita community, who would speak up and provide a different, or more balanced perspective to a number of important decisions that were being made. His speaking up often benefited Wichita's Black community.

While his influence in this area are difficult to measure, one large example of his

influence was the construction of the Boys and Girls Club in Northeast Wichita. Russ Myer, president of Cessna Aircraft, was thinking of investing in a YMCA in Northeast Wichita, but instead – based on their relationship – approached Ron about building the Boys and Girls Club. With Ron's commitment to help convince the community and help raise the funds, the project moved ahead.

"I don't ever remember that if you talk about doing the right thing that somebody didn't say, you know, that's right. We need to not do this or do it this way, because it's the right thing to do."

"I always tried to balance being honest, having good integrity, but not being the first one to be the rabble rouser," says Holt.

CONGRATULATIONS

CORPORATE TRAILBLAZER

RON HOLT

CORPORATE STANDOUTS

BRADLEY DYER, JR

RICKI ELLISON

LaSHONDA GARNES

JOHN ROLFE

MOJI ROSSON

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, congratulations on this well-earned recognition. Your remarkable leadership uplifts our community and inspires the next generation to reach for greatness.



www.wichitachamber.org