

# THE VOICE

A Trusted Voice From The Community's Perspective



## FREEDOM CELEBRATED

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATIONS IN PHOTOS: HERE AND ONLINE PAGE 8 & 9



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**Manhattan Cleaners Still Here**  
This 90-year-old KC Business Almost  
Shuttered. Here's How it Was Saved  
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# THE VOICE

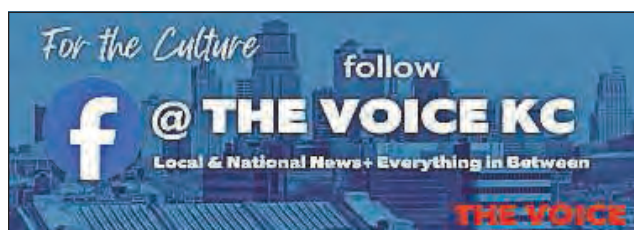
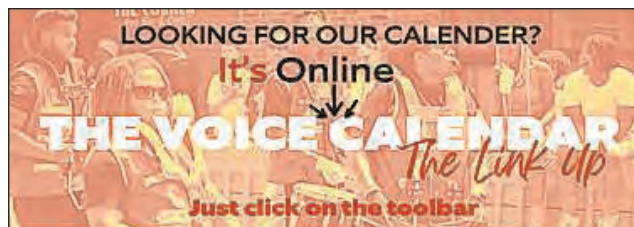
VOLUME 32, NUMBER 12  
FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 2025

## MORE WAYS TO CONNECT

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## Black Folks Can't Afford to Ignore Immigration Issues

By ReShonda Tate  
Opinion, Houston  
Defender

Let me just say it plainly: Black folks can't sit this immigration fight out. Not now. Not ever.

I know we're tired. Tired of carrying movements, of being the moral compass of the country, of fighting for justice that never seems to swing our way. I get it. We're tired of the headlines, the hashtags, the heartbreak. And maybe you're tempted to sit this one out — to let others carry the load, to sit on the rooftop with your sweet tea while immigration battles rage on below.

But if we think we can watch from the sidelines while ICE raids snatch up our Brown neighbors, let me be clear: That same system is already coming for us, too.

It's coming in the form of racial profiling, flawed facial recognition algorithms and government databases riddled with errors. It's coming with militarized raids that don't ask



about citizenship status before they knock down your door. It's coming through the same systemic pipeline that has always criminalized Black and Brown bodies. Immigration enforcement may be the tip of the spear, but the whole sword is built on anti-Blackness.

According to the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, more than a quarter of Black adult U.S. citizens do not have a driver's license with their current name or address. Nearly one in five don't have a license at all. And in a country where the line between "undocumented" and "unverified" is getting blurrier by the day, what

do you think happens when a Black person can't immediately prove their citizenship?

They get detained. Deported. Disappeared.

There are documented cases — plural — of Black American citizens being held in ICE detention centers, some for weeks, some for months. Some had birth certificates in hand. It didn't matter. Their skin, their names and their neighborhoods were deemed "suspicious." And if we think that can't happen to us or our loved ones, we're already in danger.

This is not just about immigrants. This is about state power and who it decides to target.

The same ICE that terrorizes immigrant families will be the same force that justifies expanding surveillance in Black communities. The drones over the border don't stop at the border. The same predictive policing that flags "high-risk" ZIP codes already patrols ours. And the normalization of kicking down doors in Brown neighborhoods? That's rehearsal for Black neighborhoods, too.

It's all connected.

So no, maybe you don't go out to the protests. Maybe you don't chant in the streets or call your senator. But you don't sit and sip tea either. Not while the smoke rises. Not while state violence becomes more precise, more data-driven and more relentless.

We have to show up — not just because it's right, but because we're already in the fight whether we admit it or not. Citizenship doesn't protect us. Birthright doesn't shield us. And silence won't save us.

If they can come for them, they can — and will — come for us.

## BEHIND THE CARTOON: Bombs Over Norway

By Clay Jones  
Claytoonz

A Ukrainian lawmaker nominated Donald Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize, and has now withdrawn it, saying he had "lost any sort of faith and belief" in Trump and his ability to secure a ceasefire between Moscow and Kiev.

The Ukrainian official, Oleksandr Merezhko, said Trump is "evading — he is

dodging — the need to impose sanctions on Russia." That's because he's Putin's beyotch. Has Merezhko not been paying attention all these years?

Georgia GOP Rep. Buddy Carter has formally nominated Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize, writing to the committee that it's "in recognition of his extraordinary and historic role in brokering an end to the armed conflict between Israel and Iran."

### CARTOON



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# The Community Voice Kicks Off 30th Anniversary Celebration



This year marks a powerful milestone in Black journalism across Kansas — 30 years since the founding of The Community Voice, a publication committed to telling the stories that too often go untold.

Since our very first issue on April 5, 1995, we have remained true to our founders' vision: to provide trusted, insightful, and culturally relevant journalism that uplifts and informs Black communities across Wichita, Kansas, and Kansas City.

Today, we're proud to announce the start of our year-long 30th Anniversary celebration. We're planning a full 12 months of events designed to reflect our mission — fun, educational events, with something for all ages that honor our past and build for the future.

GET READY!! We'll bring you into our celebration with what we hope will be a historic, but enjoyable, walk down memory lane as we pull out some of our stories and photos from the past in print and online.

Our special anniversary coverage and events will celebrate our history, honor the



people who've carried this paper forward, and most of all, uplift the community that's made this journey possible.

We invite you to walk with us, support us, and celebrate with us.

## A Legacy Rooted in Vision and Family

A nod to our founders whose vision we work hard to maintain.



Billy & Wyvette McCray

The Community Voice was founded by Billy Q. McCray and Wyvette McCray, a couple whose passion for quality information and strong community leadership planted the seeds for what would become a lasting institution.

Billy McCray was no stranger to leadership. He was one of the longest-serving African Americans in the Kansas Legislature, having served in both the Kansas House of Representatives and the Senate. He later continued his service on the Sedgwick County Commission.

The idea for the paper had lived in McCray's heart long before its first print run. He envisioned something lasting — something that would fill the void left by earlier Black newspapers in Wichita, such as:

The NewsHawk (1966–1984), published by Leonard Garrett, and

The Wichita Times/The Kansas Journal/The Kansas Black Journal (1970–1985), published by Jack Hudson.

With their closures, Wichita was left without a Black voice in print. While others attempted to fill the gap, none stuck. Billy McCray wanted The Community Voice to be different — and he made that clear in the very first issue:

- “Our reporters will seek out and examine stories that parallel state and national issues of the day. They will not attempt to compete with the three leading television stations of the city, nor will we try to be current as the leading daily paper of the region on violence and tragedies. Yet our news will be timely and informative; they may often be stories that you will not read in USA Today or see on a local talk show via electronic media. Yet it is the publisher's intent to convey an honest and meaningful report that the reading audience and advertising constituents would have recognized as a story that needed to be told, and at the same time, offers an insight that other media did not see as a priority.”

That quote serves as a guiding light to this day.

### A Family Affair

The McCray family launched the first issue as a true family affair. Billy and Wyvette served as co-publishers. Their daughter, Frankieleen Conley, was senior editor.

The first issue of the monthly publication featured an article by the McCrays' other daughter Melody McCray-Miller. Newly elected to the Sedgwick County Commission, she wrote about her first 60 days in office. Melody and her husband also owned Miller's Bar-B-Q, which was featured in that same issue in an article titled “That's Real Bar-B-Q.”

The first issue also included contributions from community members like Dr. Val Brown Jr., who shared insights on heart attacks, and journalist Brenda Gray, who wrote on topics including Wichita Metropolitan Family Preservation.

Other stories included one on the local Black-owned bus line Thunderbird Express and advocacy group POWER CDC, whose members were headed to Washington, D.C., for a conference. Covering our future and our past, the issue highlighted rising star Valencia Monk and honored community matriarch Bessie Halbrook.

### Loss, Transition, and Rebirth

Tragically, Wyvette McCray passed away on June 5, 1995, only two months after the first issue was published. She was just 62. She and Billy had been married for 44 years.

Her death drained Billy and his passion for

See **LEGACY** Page 4 →

## “30 for 30” Campaign: A Dollar for Every Year of Service

### Free to Take, Not Free to Make

As part of our anniversary celebration, we're asking our community to support us through our “30 for 30” fundraising campaign — asking for just \$30, a symbolic dollar for every year we've served the community.

For three decades, The Community Voice has remained free of charge, in print and online. But we say it often, because it's true:

The paper is “Free to Take, But Not Free to Make.”

Like any household or business, our costs continue to rise — printing, staffing, technology, distribution.

If The Community Voice has informed,

inspired, or empowered you at any point in the last 30 years, we hope you'll consider giving back so we can keep doing this work for generations to come.

### The Celebration Is Just Beginning

We're working on a full calendar of 30th anniversary events that will be both fun and educational, and suitable for all ages. These events will celebrate our history, honor the people who've carried this paper forward, and, most of all, uplift the community that's made this journey possible.

We invite you to walk with us, support us, and celebrate with us.

Donate today at <https://www.communityvoiceks.com/contribute/>

**LEGACY**, from Page 3 ↓

doing the work he knew producing a quality paper would require. He deeply believed in the importance of the publication and began looking for someone to carry on the vision.

Kansas state Sen. U.L. “Rip” Gooch, a friend of the McCrays, stepped in and encouraged his daughter, Bonita Gooch, to consider taking

the reins.

Bonita had just returned to Wichita after decades away. A graduate of the University of Kansas’ William Allen White School of Journalism, she hadn’t pursued a journalism career after graduation. Instead, she earned a master’s degree in public administration and had been working in city management.

She had returned home following the

untimely death of her brother, wanting to be closer to her parents, and to raise her young daughter, Lauren, in a nurturing environment.

Although uncertain at first, Bonita agreed to take on the challenge. She purchased The Community Voice in October 1996, releasing her first issue the next month.

Under Bonita’s leadership, the paper changed in appearance, expanded in coverage,

and modernized — but it never strayed from the mission laid out by the McCrays. She remained committed to highlighting the best of the community, building connections, and informing with integrity.

Bonita often emphasizes that she is merely a steward of the McCray family’s vision, and that her work has been to protect and grow the foundation they laid.

# What Was Happening Then? 1995

**Music**

- Hip-hop & R&B were dominant forces. TLC’s “Waterfalls,” Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise,” and Tupac’s “Dear Mama” were chart-toppers.
- The East Coast vs. West Coast rap rivalry between Bad Boy (Biggie) and Death Row (Tupac) intensified.

Timberland boots were in, especially in hip-hop circles.

- “Preppy casual” styles from brands like Tommy Hilfger and Polo Ralph Lauren became mainstream — especially among Black youth, who helped popularize these brands.

**Movies**

- “Friday,” “Waiting to Exhale,” and “Bad Boys” gave visibility to Black culture and talent.

**Race Relations**

- The O.J. Simpson trial dominated national attention and highlighted deep racial divisions in the country — particularly in how Black and White Americans viewed the criminal justice system.
- The 1992 L.A. Riots were still fresh, and many Black communities were dealing with the aftermath of racial tensions and police brutality.

**Fashion**

- Baggy jeans, plaid shirts, and



TLC. DON EMMERT

**Economy**

- The U.S. economy was booming — low unemployment, low inflation, and growth driven by tech and consumer spending.
- It was the early phase of the dot-com boom; tech stocks were rising, and companies like Netscape were going public.

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# 'What's Going On?' Black Leaders Question Wichita's Graduation Rate

By Suzanne Perez  
Kansas News Service

In a meeting with Wichita Superintendent Kelly Bielefeld last fall, members of the Greater Wichita Ministerial League and the NAACP questioned how the district's graduation rate is increasing while scores on state assessment tests remain low.

Some Black leaders in Wichita worry that the district's high schools could be inflating their graduation rates — and not only at Southeast High, which has been the focus of a recent grade-fixing investigation.

Members of the Greater Wichita Ministerial League and the NAACP Wichita branch met with Wichita Superintendent Kelly Bielefeld in October.

Several people who



attended the meeting said they raised questions about the district's graduation rates increasing substantially while scores on state assessment tests remained low.

Wichita schools reported a record-high graduation rate of 84.3% for the class of 2024 — a 5.1% increase from the previous year. The graduation rate has risen nearly 14% since 2018.

Meanwhile, more than two-thirds of Wichita 10th graders scored in the bottom level on the state math test in 2024. Among Black students, nearly 80% scored in the bottom level.

About half of Wichita sophomores — and 67% of Black sophomores — scored in the bottom level in English language arts.

Michelle Vann, a former

middle school teacher and member of the NAACP's education committee, said the group asked to meet with Bielefeld last fall to discuss strategies for closing the achievement gap.

"It was basically, 'Where are we at here, and what's going on?'" Vann said. "If they can't pass the state assessment, which is just basic standard core curriculum, how are they all of a sudden able to pass their regular classes? ... These numbers don't correlate."

Vann said the group also raised questions about the expansion of credit recovery programs, which allow students who fail a class to make up the course credit in a matter of weeks or even days.

"We want our Black and brown children to be walking out of these spaces educated," she said. "We're not sending our kids to school to do a packet and to get fake credit."

## Ongoing investigation

Wichita school leaders are investigating allegations of grade-fixing at Southeast High School. The school's principal was replaced last month.

Some teachers at the school said they noticed students graduating who had failed required classes, and at least one reported concerns to district and state leaders.

District officials now say

four Southeast High students were discovered to have 21 credits instead of the 23 required to graduate from Wichita schools. Kansas requires students to pass at least 21 credits, and they have until Sept. 30 to be counted among that year's graduating class.

"There are no indications of inaccuracies for past years, nor have we seen anything at other schools," said district spokeswoman Susan Arensman in an email. "We are putting checks and balances into place to make sure there are no issues or concerns with the data going forward."

Bielefeld, Wichita's superintendent, acknowledged meeting with Black leaders about graduation rates and other concerns last fall.

He said state assessments — particularly 10th-grade tests, which are the only ones administered during high school — are not an accurate reflection of what students know or can do by graduation.

"Basing the entire four years off of that one test that's taken over the course of two days seems short-sighted," Bielefeld said in an interview with KMUW.

"Not trying to discredit it. I just think it's not really enough to show the whole picture. That was part of the conversation we had then, and we continue to have in the community."

## Credit recovery

Bielefeld also defended the district's credit recovery programs, saying they are a way for students who have fallen behind to earn credits and graduate rather than dropping out.

"We really, truly believe that every kid needs an opportunity, and sometimes a second opportunity," he said. "So, we've tried to offer a gamut of different avenues. But the credit is the credit, and you have to pass."

Wichita schools offer a variety of credit recovery programs, including traditional summer school and teacher-staffed learning centers at every high school. There's also the Simon Youth Academy at Towne East Square and Chester Lewis Academic Learning Center, where students can earn both recovery or original credits.

Another program called Extended Learning Opportunity, or ELO, is designed to keep students from needing credit recovery. If a student fails a class with a grade between 50% and 59%, they can attend ELO to complete assignments and turn the F into a D.

Some students "stop short of graduating because they need a little more time or focus," said Rachel Bell, director of communication for Wichita schools. "We know that education and a high school diploma often open doors and change the trajectory of lives."

Dr. Michelle Vann, the NAACP member, said there needs to be more accountability with credit recovery to ensure that students are meeting state standards.

"Is it fair to our students who are working their butts off that you can be failing and then ... in two or three weeks, you can now get a credit?" she said.

See GRADUATIONS

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**THE VOICE** **WJC** Wichita Journalism COLLABORATIVE **LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

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# Breaking Barriers, Building Futures

## Through Bridges Out of Poverty Program, Jo Lynn Bright Leads Healing Work in Wichita's Underserved Communities

**By Ty Davis**  
The Community Voice

For many Black families in Wichita, poverty, trauma, and a lack of mental health support create barriers to growth. Too often, these challenges go unaddressed due to stigma and mistrust within the community and limited access to culturally competent care.

Bright is the Community Impact Director at HopeNet, a faith-based nonprofit organization transforming lives through coaching and counseling. For 30 years HopeNet has provided mental health services based on clients' ability to pay – all made possible by donor support.

Bright leads HopeNet's BridgesICT program that

focuses on bringing mental health support and poverty-reduction strategies to Wichita's most under-resourced communities, many of whom are often African American.

Originally from Junction City, Kansas, Bright grew up in a large, well-known Black family. That foundation of community shaped her path.

After earning a degree in Family Life and Human Development, she built a career dedicated to strengthening families – from working with the state's Department for Children and Families to serving as a Marriage & Family Therapist, and now leading outreach efforts at HopeNet.

"When people see someone who looks like them and listens without judgment, it changes the dynamic," Bright says. "We're not just offering resources – we're rebuilding trust."

### Getting Ahead: A Life-Changing Opportunity

At the heart of BridgesICT is Getting Ahead, a 16-week group program designed for individuals living in or near poverty. The program helps participants examine their current situation, identify strengths and challenges, and create a plan for stability and opportunity.

HopeNet has offered Getting Ahead classes for more than 10 years. BridgesICT, launched in 2023, aims to expand this effort to Wichita's 10 poorest ZIP codes over the next decade.

Participants must complete an application and interview process to ensure they are ready to fully engage in the program. A new class typically begins each August and runs through December.



After earning a degree in Family Life and Human Development, Jo Lynn Bright has built a career dedicated to strengthening families

The program removes common barriers to participation by offering:

- Family-style meals at each session
- Free childcare
- A stipend to honor participants' time and effort
- A trauma-informed, supportive environment focused on personal growth

"This isn't about budgeting or job skills – though those things may follow," Bright explains. "It's about helping people shift how they see themselves and what they believe is possible."

Ty Davis, a 2022 graduate of the Getting Ahead class, said:

"The class was truly a call to action. Since graduating, I've been dedicated to planning community events focused on connecting people with the resources they need to thrive."

### HopeNet's Broader Commitment

Bright's leadership extends beyond Getting Ahead. She

helps build partnerships and design programming that ensures mental health resources reach families most impacted by poverty and systemic barriers. HopeNet offers professional therapy and coaching on a sliding scale to ensure no one is turned away due to financial need.

Graduation ceremonies are described as powerful moments where participants reflect on how the program has changed their lives and families.

"This work is about building a healthier Wichita – a city where Black families and all families are growing, thriving, and building futures," Bright says.

### How to Get Involved

- For counseling or coaching: Call HopeNet at (316) 684-4673 (intake is free)
- For Getting Ahead or BridgesICT information: Visit [www.bridgesict.org](http://www.bridgesict.org) or email [bridgesict@hopenetwichita.org](mailto:bridgesict@hopenetwichita.org).

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# Seven Early Signs of a Heart Attack

Recognizing subtle symptoms - like cold sweats, stomach discomfort and nausea - could be the key to survival.

## By The Voice Health News

Your body may be warning you about a heart attack. The question is, are you listening?

Some people experience early signs of a heart attack (myocardial infarction) in the day or hours leading up to a cardiac event — and those indicators may be much less obvious than you might expect.

Recognizing early heart attack symptoms could save your life or the life of someone around you, says cardiologist Jacqueline Tamis-Holland, MD, of the Cleveland Clinic.

Here are the red flags that deserve your attention.

Heart attacks can be sudden and unmistakable, of course. A person may clutch their



Some people experience early signs of a heart attack in the day or hours leading up to a cardiac event — and those indicators may be much less obvious than you might expect.

chest in pain, start sweating buckets and even collapse. (That's probably what you typically imagine when you think of someone having a heart

attack.)

But that's NOT ALWAYS the case, says Tamis-Holland.

In some people, heart attacks come on more gradually

with signs that may not seem like an emergency. Early warning signs that can be easy to shrug off include:

- Pressure or tightness in your chest (rather than pain)
- Pain in areas such as your arms, jaw, neck or back
- Cold sweats
- Heartburn or indigestion
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or vomiting
- Unusual fatigue

"If you're having some of these subtle symptoms of a heart attack and you don't think you're at risk for a heart attack, it makes it easier to ignore those warning signs and brush them off as something else," says Tamis-Holland.

But ignoring these signs can be a life-threatening decision, she warns.

## Are Warning Signs Different for Women than Men?

Chest pain or pressure is the most common symptom of a heart attack, no matter your sex. It can feel like someone (or an elephant, to use a popular metaphor) is sitting on your chest.

But about 30% of women are more likely to experience less-obvious symptoms while having a heart attack, says Tamis-Holland. That includes:

- Shortness of breath, fatigue and insomnia that started before the heart attack
- Pain in their back, shoulders, neck, arms or abdomen
- Nausea and vomiting

In addition, women are less likely to have that common chest pain feeling (particularly

in the center of their chest) or indigestion-like discomfort.

These subtle signs are especially concerning given the heightened dangers that a heart attack brings to women. Research shows that women are more than twice as likely than men to die after a heart attack.

You can read the rest of this story online. Just scan this QR code.



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# Celebrating Our Freedom 2025

## Juneteenth ICT

What has turned into the city's largest cultural event had a full week of activities plus the Miss Juneteenth Pageant held June 8. We dropped in on Fri., Sat., and Sun., June 20-22. The parade – AWESOME!!

## Juneteenth Topeka

Juneteenth in the state's capital included more than a week of events. We checked out the parade through downtown on Sat., June 14, and the festival in the park the following Saturday.

## Juneteenth KCMO

One of our favorites, the Juneteenth Parade got rained out, but there were plenty more activities across the city to satisfy any Juneteenth fan. We made it back to KC for the granddaddy of the metro celebrations, Juneteenth KC in the 18th & Vine Jazz District.

## Juneteenth in the Dotte

Kansas City, KS - "The Dotte" celebrated Juneteenth over two days with a parade on Sat., June 21, along 5th Avenue followed by an afternoon of celebration. The celebration continued on Sunday with a Black vendor fair along Quindaro Boulevard.

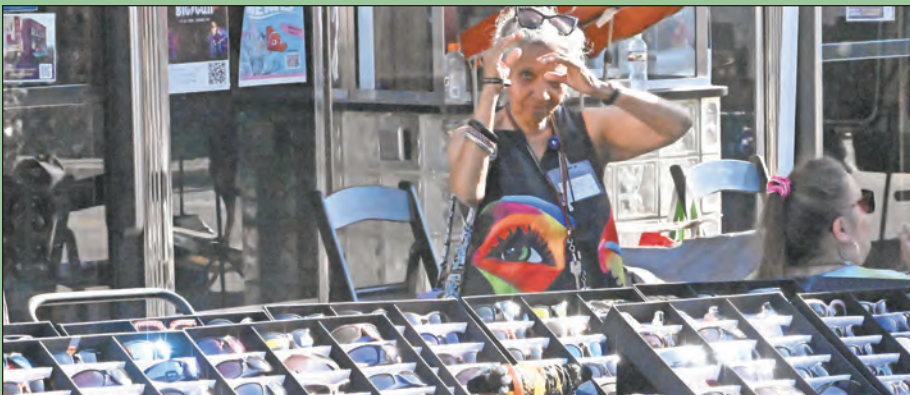
## WICHITA



## TOPEKA



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# KCKS



We have a lot more photos from Juneteenth events across the region online. Click here to see more.

# Sly James Pavillion Dedicated in a Surprise Ceremony

By Bonita Gooch  
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

Sylvester “Sly” James Jr. Pavilion at the Kansas City Convention Center earlier this week.

The modern concrete pavilion, located on the southeast corner of the convention center at 16th Street and Wyandotte, features a metal bust of James wearing his signature glasses.

“The pavilion will be a lasting tribute to James’ positive impact on both our city’s infrastructure and our children’s futures,” said Lucas during the ceremony.

James served as Kansas City mayor from 2011 to 2019. During his eight years as the city’s 54th mayor, James’ first major accomplishment was creating Turn the Page KC (TTPKC), now an independent 501(c)(3) organization



The Sly James Pavilion is located at the southern edge of the KC Convention Center, on the northwest corner of 16th and Wyandotte.

dedicated to achieving reading proficiency for all Kansas City third graders.

He also spearheaded major infrastructure and economic development



James with a smaller version of the bust that’s installed at the pavilion.

initiatives, including the KC Streetcar system and planning for the new KC International Airport terminal.

## Prospect Corridor Residents Rise Up: ‘We’re Done Being Ignored’

By Thomas White  
Kansas City Reporter

After years of watching their neighborhood become a battleground, residents of KC’s Prospect corridor took their fight directly to the businesses they say profit from their community’s pain.

Community leaders, backed by dozens of residents, held a demonstration at 35th and Prospect calling for change before marching into the BP gas station and Big D’s Liquor store, demanding accountability.

“Stop taking our dollars if you’re not going to invest in our safety,” said Jackson County Prosecutor Melesa Johnson as tears swelled. “These tears are not a sign of weakness—they’re a sign of frustration.”

Johnson, who lives in and grew up in the area, said she heard the gunshots from her bedroom during the previous weekend’s violence that claimed six lives citywide.



Jackson County Prosecutor Melesa Johnson got teary when she addressed concerns about safety in the neighborhood she calls home.

The intersection has been a community flashpoint for years, with residents saying up to 40 people gather daily to drink, gamble, and deal drugs while businesses look the other way.

“I used to play in these same streets until I decided to grow up,” said Pat Clarke, president of the Oak Park Neighborhood Association. “Today is the day we decide we don’t put up

with this no more.”

The owner of the BP station said he can’t afford security and feared confronting gathered groups, while the owner of Big D’s promised security starting in July. Mayor Quinton Lucas pledged action through the city’s permitting office if nothing was done. “If we need to, we will shut you down,” said Lucas. “Everyone in this city deserves safety.”

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# KC's Manhattan Cleaners: Historic Black-Business Not Done Yet

One of KC's oldest continuously running Black-owned businesses almost closed in November, but customer and employee support encouraged the owner to push on, but for how long?

By **Thomas White**  
Kansas City Reporter

The smell of pressed fabric fills the air at Manhattan Cleaners & Hat Works. Behind the counter, machines hum steadily as workers restore clothes to a crisp clean. Framed photographs line the walls with decades of history captured in black and white.

A customer walks in with a vintage fedora. Another drops off dress shirts for the week. The phone rings with questions from a neighbor. This is old-school service in an age of strip-mall convenience.

"If you can wear it, we can clean it," says owner Michael King, reciting the family motto that has guided the business for 90 years.

## Historic Black-Owned Business

Manhattan Cleaners opened in 1935 when King's parents, James and Martha King, started the original shop at 22nd and Vine in KC's historic jazz district. The family built a network of cleaners throughout the neighborhood's thriving Black business corridor.

King, now 80, took over operations when his father needed heart surgery. The business moved to its current location on Swope Parkway in 1966 and has served the area for nearly six decades.

"I've seen generations of people in my time working at the shop," says King. "Heck, I've seen them come in young and then next thing you know their grandchildren are coming in."

## Customers Ask Him to Stay Open

Last November, King announced plans for his retirement. He was ready to close the doors after decades of marathon work weeks.

Word spread quickly on social media that Manhattan Cleaners was closing.

"I have loyal customers, so a lot of people were asking, 'What are we gonna do? Where are we gonna go?'" King remembered. "A few people said we were 'pillars of the community,' and I found that flattering."

Sally Yates, King's niece, who has worked at the shop for three years, had mixed feelings about the closure announcement.

"I was kind of on the fence about [closing or staying open]," says Yates. "On one hand, he's been a staple in the community and I'd love to see this place make it to 100 years. At the same time, though, Uncle deserves to retire, travel a little bit, and relax."

## New Arrangement Gives Business New Life

Several Manhattan Cleaner's employees had their own ideas. A group led by longtime staff members approached King with a proposal to keep the business running.

Staff convinced King to let them take over daily operations. They handle the cleaning, pressing, and customer service while King manages finances and focuses on his specialty — hat restoration.

"I'm still their hat man," King said. "That's my expertise."

The arrangement has breathed new life into the business. King now works a few hours a day instead of the 80-hour weeks of his younger years. He says his employees have proven they can maintain the quality and service that built the shop's



Michael King is the second-generation operator of Manhattan Cleaners in KCMO, opened by his parents in 1935.

reputation.

Business had slowed when word spread that Manhattan Cleaners was closing, but customers are returning as they learn the shop remains open.

"Once they realized we didn't close, customers were coming in here with big bags of clothes," says Yates. "Shoot, they definitely keep me busy."

## Full-Service, In-House Cleaners

Everything happens on-site at Manhattan Cleaners. The nine-person team cleans clothes, restores shoes, and blocks hats using equipment and techniques passed down through generations. Only leather goods are sent elsewhere.

"We've never closed in the past 90 years," King says. "Through the Depression, through World War II, we never closed."

One of KC's Oldest Continuous Operating Black-Owned Business

Photographs around the shop reflect KC's history, like the original



King the hatman: Now in semi-retirement, King is still the one to turn to for professional hat cleaning.

22nd and Vine location in the heart of the jazz district, where musicians like Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie lived and played.

King remembers making deliveries to jazz legends staying at the Street Hotel when segregation kept them from downtown

accommodations.

King's father worked for a hat cleaning business on 12th Street before the owners helped him start his own shop with equipment and encouragement.

Manhattan Cleaners  
& Hat Works  
5847 Swope Parkway, KCMO  
Phone: 816-523-4486

# Wyandotte Primary Candidates Part II: District 5, Sheriff and BPU At-Large 1

Primary elections will be held Aug. 5 in the mayor, sheriff, Board of Public Utilities At-Large Position 1, and the following Wyandotte County Board of Commissioner seats – District 2 At-Large and Districts 1, 5 & 8.

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

With what is likely an unprecedented number of candidates running for office in Wyandotte County, primaries are being held in all but three of the nine seats up for election in November.

The primaries will narrow the field of candidates in each race to two, which is down from as high as six in the race for UG CEO/mayor. The top two individuals from each race in the Aug. 5 primaries move forward to the general election.

We previously covered the candidates for mayor, and Wyandotte County Commission District 1 and 8. In this article, we'll look briefly at the candidates for the WYCO District 5 race, the WYCO sheriff's race and the Board of Public Utilities

At-Large District 1 race.

Wyandotte County Board of Commissioners races are non-partisan, which means candidates run in a big pool, rather than by political party. Here's who's running.

To see our coverage on the previously covered races click here <https://bit.ly/4kbJc5o> and here <https://bit.ly/44lCMuu>.

### District 5

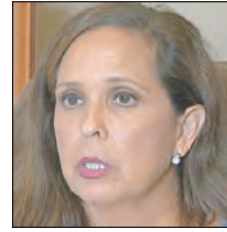
There are three candidates in the race for District 5 Wyandotte County Commission. The district is predominantly west of 77th Street, north of Parallel and west to 139th Street.

Candidate **Alma D. Hall, PhD**, is a self-described "proud Mexican immigrant, U.S. citizen, and lifelong registered Democrat." She has lived in Wyandotte County for 30 years

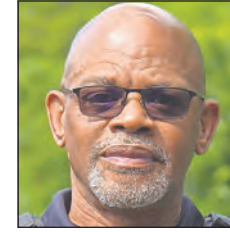
and has extensive experience in education leadership.

**LaVert Murray** retired from the Unified Government after 37 years. He worked as the UG community development department director and, until earlier this month, worked post-retirement as economic development adviser to Mayor Tyrone Garner. Murray said one person can make a difference if that person remains rational and independent-minded, practices good stewardship and cares about the concerns of other people.

**Carlos Pacheco III, MD**, is a certified family medicine physician. A WYCO native, he graduated from the University of Kansas School of Medicine and previously served as chief resident of the UMKC Community and Family Medicine Residency at Truman Medical Center – Lakewood.



Alma Hall



David Kearney



Gary Bradley Lopez



Lavert Murray



Carlos Pacheco



Michael Paulson



Daniel Soptic



Celisha Towers

### Wyandotte County Sheriff

**Sheriff Daniel Soptic**, who is completing his first term, is seeking re-election. He began his law enforcement career in 2004

with the Kansas City Kansas Park Rangers before it merged with the sheriff's office in 2009.

Running against Soptic is **David Kearney** who is

currently a master sergeant in the Kansas City Kansas Police Dept. We were not able to find

See **CANDIDATES** Page 15 →

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VCC is soliciting proposals from qualified subcontractors to work on the Berkley Riverfront Unit TI with Hardscape and Amenities package in Kansas City, Missouri. Project documents are available for review through **Building Connected** under the “Files” Tab. Please contact the VCC Team for project access.

**Bids are 7/14/25, with scope review to be complete by 7/21/25 and contractor award 7/28/25.**

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| ▪ Wood Wall Paneling    | ▪ Trash Chutes         |
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If you are interested in additional information about the job opportunities during the construction phase of the Berkley Riverfront Unit TI with Hardscape and Amenities package contact:

**Jerry Salo: 678-510-4429 or JSALO@VCCUSA.COM**

**Travis Mason: 214-425-9021 or TMASON@VCCUSA.COM**



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Field Station Dinosaurs in Derby is one of 149 museums in Kansas participating in this year’s Sunflower Summer Program.

# Kansas Tourism Announces 2025 Sunflower Summer Attraction Lineup

Program offers free admission for children and one accompanying adult at more than 230 tourist attractions across Kansas.

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

Kansas Tourism today announced that more than 230 tourism attractions across the state are participating in the 2025 Sunflower Summer program. The lineup includes something for every interest and region of the state — museums and historic sites, zoos, arboretums, art centers and more.

“With such a wide variety of exceptional attractions participating this year, Sunflower Summer continues to open doors for Kansas families to explore and connect with every corner of our state,” Lt. Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland said.

“This program not only creates unforgettable memories for students and parents — it also fuels local economies by drawing visitors to main streets, museums and hidden gems across Kansas.”

The 2025 Sunflower Summer program will run July 12 to Aug. 3. During this period, eligible students and one accompanying adult are granted free one-time access to each participating attraction, once per season. Passes can be claimed through the free Sunflower Summer app and redeemed at the attraction upon arrival.

Kansas students from pre-K through 12th grade — including those in public, private and homeschool settings — are eligible to participate. The program is exclusively

available to Kansas residents.

“We’re thrilled to bring back Sunflower Summer for another year,” Kansas Tourism Director Bridgette Jobe said. “This program is a wonderful celebration of the incredible experiences Kansas has to offer. The variety and quality of attractions participating this year truly are outstanding — and we can’t wait for the season to begin.”

Families are encouraged to share their Sunflower Summer journeys on social media using #ToTheStarsKS and #SunflowerSummer. For the complete list of participating attractions and full program details, plus more Kansas travel ideas and inspiration, go to [SunflowerSummer.org](http://SunflowerSummer.org).

LOOKING FOR OUR CALENDER?  
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# 'The Wiz' Preview: Q&A with Kyla Jade

Homegrown 'The Voice' finalist comes to KC Music Hall for the 50th anniversary tour of this Tony Award-winning play.

By Thomas White  
Kansas City Reporter

When "The Wiz" follows the yellow-brick road to Kansas City's Music Hall July 8-13, it brings with it a homecoming. Kyla Jade, the powerhouse vocalist playing Aunt Em and the villainous Evillene, has deep Kansas roots.

Jade was born in Manhattan, raised in Topeka, and has family in Wichita, where her great-grandfather built a church and where her singing career began.

"The Voice" third-place finisher in the show's 2018 season had a stellar career before the television competition and after. She spent 15 years as a lead singer on "The Bobby Jones Gospel Hour" on BET. She also toured as a backup singer for Wynonna Judd, Patti LaBelle and Jennifer Hudson.

Now, she's making her national musical debut in the 50th anniversary tour of "The Wiz," a Tony Award-winning show that helped revive Broadway in 1985.

We spoke with Jade about there being no place like home, signing in church, stepping into Broadway villainy, her Go Chicken Go order, and why "The Wiz" continues to resonate 50 years after its groundbreaking debut.

**What's it like bringing this production to your home?** Kansas has always been one of my biggest supporters. When I was on "The Voice," Kansas and Kansas City showed out for me and voted for me in a way that I will never forget. So, to be able to come home where so many of my church family members and people who have grown up with me and followed my journey are is very humbling.

**What can audiences expect from this production of "The Wiz"?** You will see Black excellence, you will see joy, you will see great storytelling, and you will be able to journey



Kyla Jade as Evillene and the ensemble of the North American Tour of "The Wiz."

(PHOTO: JEREMY DANIEL)

with Dorothy to find her place. It'll be done with fantastic costuming, wonderful lights, and great singing.

My castmates are all just incredible, you'll be blown away. I mean, just for an example, the choreographer worked with Beyonce, which isn't nothing. The whole show just oozes excellence.

**How did your Kansas upbringing shape your musical journey?** I grew up singing in church, and the thing that helps with the parallels between church and theater is that we learn how to present ourselves very quickly. You learn how to tell stories very early and how to hold people's attention. Plus, my mother

taught me with music, and everything was a song. So now anything in my life is set to the tune of a song, even doing the dishes, and that translates well into musical theater.

**Why do you think "The Wiz" has such staying power after 50 years?** Finding a home is universal. Everyone is looking for home, everyone is looking to be accepted, and everyone is looking to be heard. The story can last another 50 years because everyone is searching for that home. Your grandmother, your mom, and your kids can all come and take something from this show.

**How'd you go from singing in church to belting it out in "The Wiz"?** I've been singing

professionally for over 20 years. My first tour was with Wynonna Judd and The Judds at 21. I've been producing and singing background for artists professionally for a long time. I've had a couple of things go viral because people have phones now, but there was an impromptu song that I sang for Jennifer Hudson that everyone loved, and that got me an audition for "The Voice."

I don't like competitions, so I didn't want to do it at first, but I ended up having a good experience. From there, I wanted to just try something new and different. I got a lot of no's and not-right-nows on my journey, but "The Wiz" said yes, and I've been thrilled with it.

**What's different about this staging when compared to the movie?** There are a few modern twists, particularly with the dances and music. There's an infusion of ballet, jazz, and modern tap. It feels modern but still has an old-school feel.

So you still get the same qualities of the original, but this staging brings it current. If you've never seen "The Wiz" or wore out the VHS growing up, you'll enjoy the show just the same.

**Were you intimidated stepping into Evillene's shoes, following Mabel King and Mary J. Blige?** I wasn't nervous because I've always wanted to play a villain. They get great songs. I wanted to give her a softer side — I wanted her to show her vulnerability.

I enjoyed the challenge of: How do I make this story relevant for now, but still familiar to those who know this character? It was difficult, but it's been challenging in the most rewarding way.

**Any Kansas City food stops planned?**

I genuinely miss Go Chicken Go. As soon as I get in, I'm going to go there first. My standard order is a two-piece snack or those gizzards with G sauce.

## GRADUATIONS, from Page 5 ↓

### Graduation rate formula

One additional factor in Wichita's rising graduation rate: Increased efforts to track students who leave the system.

Federal law requires schools to measure their graduation rate by dividing the number of graduates by the number of freshmen who started high school four years earlier — minus any students who transfer, leave the country or die during

that period. Students who leave without officially withdrawing are counted as dropouts, which lowers the graduation rate.

Lauren Hatfield, Wichita's assistant superintendent of secondary schools, said school officials spend more time now tracking down students who leave for other states or districts and deleting those numbers from the graduation-rate formula.

"If we don't do a good job with record keeping ... that counts against

us, because our data didn't keep up and wasn't clean enough," Hatfield said.

Students who move to a home-school or unaccredited private school count against the district's graduation rate, Hatfield said.

Wichita school board members said they feel confident in the district's graduation rate and the ongoing investigation centered on Southeast.

"We have to be able to trust those numbers," said board president

Diane Albert. "When anything happens that removes any of that trust ... we're going to investigate it, and we're going to handle it appropriately."

Board member Stan Reeser said the district is auditing graduation numbers.

"And if we find that this is not a one-off, then we will address it," he said.

He said Wichita's rising graduation rates are the result of hard work and a reason to celebrate.

"It appears to me that there is an effort to undermine public education whether we do a good job or not," Reeser said. "And that's frustrating."

*Suzanne Perez reports on education for KMUW, KCUR, Kansas Public Radio and High Plains Public Radio focused on health, the social determinants of health and their connection to public policy.*

*The Kansas News Service is a collaboration of KMUW, KCUR, Kansas Public Radio and High Plains Public Radio focused on health, the social determinants of health and their connection to public policy.*



**Roderick Holmes, 62**

December 30, 1961 - June 21, 2025 Graveside Service will be held at 10 am on July 1 at Maple Grove Cemetery, 1000 N. Hillside

**Barbara Jean Brunson, 87**

February 2, 1938 - June 12, 2025

Service was held June 28 at the Tabernacle Bible Church.

**Alberta Mack, 93**

August 30, 1931 - June 9, 2025

Service was held June 24 at the New Testament Baptist Church,

**Edward Reed, Jr, 76**

June 6, 1949 - June 9, 2025

Service was held June 20 at New Jerusalem Baptist Church.

**MANHATTAN,**  
from Page 11 ↓

“My dad worked for this Jewish gentleman cleaning and blocking hats, and he’d shine shoes,” says King. “They liked him so well that they gave him some hat equipment, some blocks, and a press machine to start out.”

Today, Manhattan Cleaners stands as one of KC’s oldest continuously operating

Black-owned businesses.

**King Still Hopes for a Buyer**

King still hopes to find a buyer who will maintain the shop’s name and dry cleaning tradition. Without children to pass the business to, he’s looking for someone to pick up the torch.

“I would love somebody to buy the business, keep it as a dry cleaners, and keep the name,” King says. “I would like to have Manhattan Cleaners continue

for 100 years, but, frankly, I’d entertain all kinds of offers.”

For now, the arrangement works for everyone. King gets a well-earned semi-retirement while staying connected to the business he’s spent his life building.

“I really think that I’ve done what I was supposed to do,” King says, reflecting on his parents’ legacy. “Biblically speaking, I’ve done right by them, keeping this going for 90 years.”

**MBE / WBE  
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JE Dunn Construction Company is bidding the JE Dunn HQ Office Renovation and request your bid proposal for applicable material and/or labor. In particular, we are soliciting M/WBE Subcontractor/Supplier Bid Proposals for the following scope(s) of work including, but not limited to: PR – 01 Main Entry Canopy

We would appreciate your indication of the scope of work you will include in your proposal by July 11 th , 2025. Proposals must be submitted to Cameron Woods or our office located at 1001 Locust St, Kansas City, MO 64106 by July 11 th , 2025, before 1:00 PM.

JE Dunn invites M/WBE subcontractors to call if any assistance is required or questions arise concerning work segmentation, work and contract requirements, or the form of proposal requested. Questions should be directed to Cameron Woods, Project Manager, by phone at (816) 309-5032, or by email at Cameron.woods@jedunn.com.

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**CANDIDATES,**  
from Page 12 ↓

out much more about Kearney, but he was active at the KCK Juneteenth, introducing himself to attendees. For the third time in a row, **Celisha Towers** is running for this position. She’s a former sheriff’s deputy who also sued the department for discrimination.

**BPU At-Large District 1**

**Gary Bradley-Lopez**, who previously had an unsuccessful run for USD 500 school

board, is back. A full-time theater teacher and part-time debate coach in USD 500, Bradley-Lopez said he’s running “because it’s time for those who are truly impacted by our utilities to have a representative at the table — someone who has lived the experience and understands the needs of our community.”

**Michael Paulson** Is a financial advisor with Windsor Financial Group. He’s been active in politics for years, serving as regional organizing director and campaign manager

for a number of candidates across the midwest.

We could not find much information on candidate **Alex Sanchez**. He unsuccessfully ran for the BPU in 2023.


In addition to running for the BPU, **Lisa Walker-Yeager** is also a candidate for the Unified Government District 1 seat. She’s been active in the community, most recently as a member of the WYCO Commonwealth Advocacy Coalition that campaigned to defeat the \$420 million school bond election.

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