

THE VOICE

A Trusted Voice From The Community's Perspective



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As We *Wrap Up* Our Year

Our Annual Holiday Greetings Issue

We hope you enjoy our annual holiday greetings issue. These holiday messages – through out this issue – reflect the strong support of businesses and organizations that believe in our community—and in The Community Voice. We thank them for helping sustain our work and encourage you to support their work.



As we close out 2025, we thank you for trusting THE VOICE to tell our stories. Your support makes this work possible. Wishing you and your family a

Merry Christmas and a powerful New Year

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giving. Your support helps sustain independent, community-centered journalism that informs, uplifts, and holds space for our voices in 2026.

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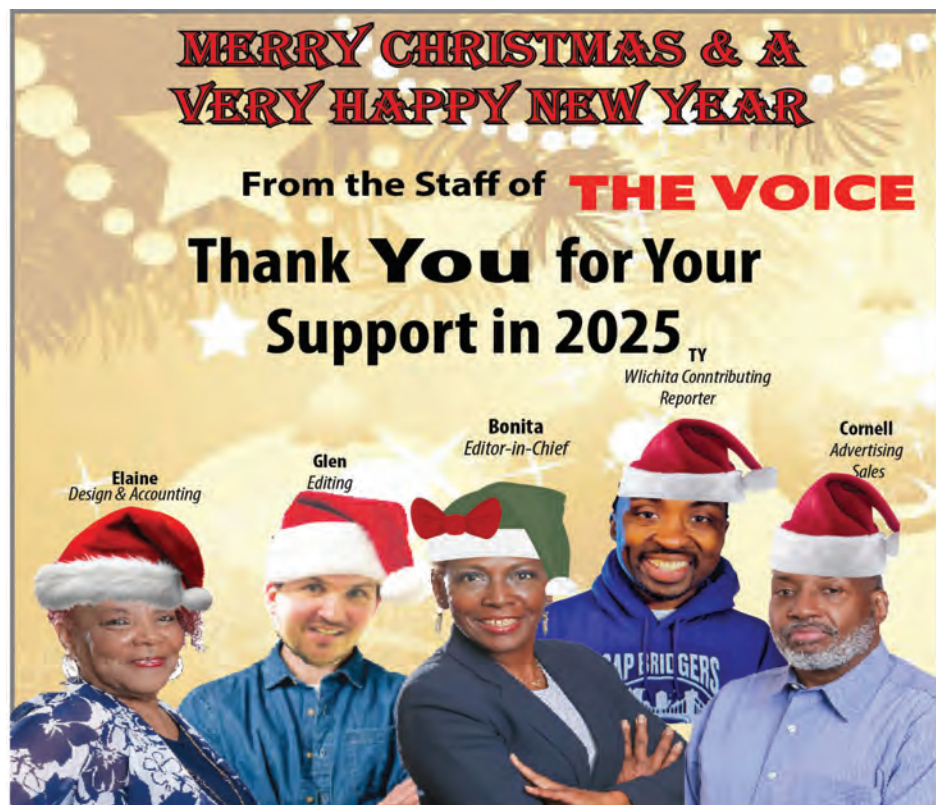
Nominate Now: The Great 28 Class of 2026

Our annual **Great 28** honors outstanding African Americans across Kansas and the Kansas City metro who are shaping our communities through leadership, service, creativity, and innovation. We are now accepting

nominations online. If you know someone whose impact deserves recognition, submit their name today.

Deadline: December 31, 2025

Submit at: <https://www.communityvoiceks.com>, Click on more – the Great 28 nominations



Divine 9 Roll Call: Help Us Celebrate Black Greek Excellence

In our January 5, 2026, we'll publish a special feature celebrating Divine 9 chapters across Kansas and the Kansas City metro. Our team

has worked hard to locate and reach out to as many chapters as possible—but with dozens of undergraduate and alumni chapters spread across two states, we need your help to ensure no one is missed.

This feature is **free** and meant to uplift the history, pride, and service of Black Greek-letter organizations. If you're part of a Divine 9 chapter, please submit: Chapter name, founding year, Area

served, Key service projects, Chapter president's name for 2026.

We understand protocol says this information should come through the chapter. If you're seeing this, please let someone in your chapter know about this celebration

Show your pride—represent your chapter!

Submit at: communityvoiceks.com/ click on more The Divine 9



Submit Your MLK Events for Our Print and Online Calendar

Our first print edition of the year will feature a Kansas + Kansas City Metro MLK Events To be included:

- Submit your event using our online calendar format (look for calendar submission on our toolbar @communityvoiceks.

com or go to <https://www.communityvoiceks.com/submit-community-events/>

And/or

- Email flyers/information to guillory@tcvpub.com

Deadline: January 5, 2026

The calendar will run in our **January 9 print issue** and our **January 12 Wichita Monday and KC Monday newsletters.**

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The Hardings: Family-Built Social Success

More Than Followers: A Wichita-Based Family Builds a Worldwide Brand

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in Chief

At just 24 years old, **D'Aydrian Harding** has built a career that extends far beyond viral moments. With roughly **11 million followers on TikTok** and **more than 4 million subscribers on YouTube**, Harding has turned social media attention into **sold-out global tours**, a fast-growing merchandise business, original music, and a platform with real influence—while remaining firmly rooted in Wichita.

While D'Aydrian is the face of the brand, his success is inseparable from his family. His mother, **Demetria Whiting**, widely known as *Mama Harding*, and his stepfather, **Billy Whiting**, are central to the operation. Billy describes Demetria as the one who “runs things,” overseeing organization and day-to-day management, while he focuses on the business infrastructure—finances, contracts, and legal protection. Both are clear, however, that **D'Aydrian leads the creative direction**, shaping the content, tone, and vision that fans recognize instantly.

A viral moment—and the decision to build something more

D'Aydrian's rise began in 2020 at his first concert, a DaBaby show. From the front row, his energy caught the rapper's attention. DaBaby pulled him onstage. Friends recorded it. The clip went viral.

But Harding didn't want to be known for just that one moment.

Leaning into what his family says had always been true—that he was naturally funny, expressive, and fearless—he began creating his own videos

consistently. By **August 2020**, when Demetria first reached out to *The Community Voice*, D'Aydrian already had **about 1.1 million followers on TikTok**, proof that the momentum was real and growing.

From short clips to real connection

Even as his TikTok following grew into the tens of millions, Harding made a deliberate pivot toward YouTube. **The difference wasn't just numbers—it was time.** TikTok delivered reach and speed. YouTube allowed fans to spend **20, 30, even 40 minutes** with him at a time, creating a deeper, more personal connection.

That connection helped broaden his audience. While his core fan base skews young—boys as young as 9 through their early teens—parents and adults often watch alongside them. Mothers told *The Community Voice* their sons have Harding's videos playing “24/7” on the TV.

How Mama Harding became part of the brand

Mama Harding never planned to be in front of the camera. In the beginning, she was behind it—recording her son's early videos, helping him post consistently, and supporting the work quietly. As D'Aydrian's following grew, he pulled her into the frame.

Fans responded immediately.

Her humor, authenticity, and natural chemistry with her son resonated, and Mama Harding quickly built a fan base of her own. Today, she has nearly **800,000 followers on TikTok**, becoming a personality in her own right while remaining deeply involved in the business. A longtime nurse, Demetria was

able to retire at 50—not to slow down, but to refocus her career on helping her son build something lasting.

Wichita as home—and as content

Much of Harding's content is filmed in and around Wichita, often alongside his closest collaborators, **Sammy Ndabaga** and **Jaythan Lutz**. A significant amount is recorded at Harding's massive, **custom-designed home**, which doubles as a creative hub and frequently appears in videos. The property includes a **pool, putting green, and a half-court basketball setup**, features that fans instantly recognize.

It really is where **D'Aydrian lives—not Demetria and Billy—but Mama Harding says she spends a great deal of time there**, as it serves as a central gathering place for planning, filming, and creativity. Scenes often spill out into recognizable Wichita locations.

A group of younger relatives—brothers and cousins—are sometimes pulled into the videos, often becoming the punchline before turning the tables on D'Aydrian and the crew.

From screens to stages: the live show format

Harding has figured out how to translate digital fame into real-world energy. His live shows follow a **clearly structured format**, written and designed by D'Aydrian himself.

The show opens with **Sammy Ndabaga**, whose African roots shape his segment. He comes out first to **African-style music and beats**, soccer ball in hand, showcasing footwork and rhythm that immediately engages the crowd. **Jaythan**

Lutz follows with a physical, comedic segment that often spills into the audience, keeping the energy high.

D'Aydrian's entry is unmistakable: **he comes on stage dunking a basketball**, instantly sending the crowd into a frenzy. From there, he launches into his music, crowd interaction, and non-stop movement that carries the momentum through the rest of the show. Mama Harding typically appears later, typically greeted by signs and chants from fans who know her nearly as well as they know her son.

They've taken that show on the road through multiple legs of the **Stay Sober Tour**, including a **West Coast tour, Spring and Summer tours across multiple U.S. cities**, and most recently **four stops in Australia**, where, according to Billy Whiting, fans screamed and reacted **“like he was a Beatle.”**

“Stay Sober” and a message parents hear

At the center of Harding's brand is a message that resonates deeply with parents: **Stay Sober**. It appears across his merchandise and is reinforced throughout his content. According to his family, D'Aydrian has never had a drink or used drugs.

For Demetria, the message is personal. Her father struggled with alcoholism, and she taught her sons that if a situation doesn't feel right, they don't have to go along with it. Parents regularly share stories of how Harding's message helped their children walk away from drugs or destructive behavior.

Faith, family, and “Thank U Jesus”

Faith is another constant thread in Harding's work. His



D'Aydrian Harding squats to take a photo with a young fan clutching his toy during the family's holiday giveaway in northeast Wichita.



Jaythan Lutz, left, and Sammy Ndabaga right — key collaborators in D'Aydrian Harding's videos and live shows—take a photo with a fan during the family's holiday toy giveaway.

“Thank U Jesus” line of merchandise features that phrase boldly emblazoned on the front, and on the back, a cross paired with *John 3:16*—**his favorite Bible scripture.**

D'Aydrian grew up at **First Church of God in Christ** in Wichita, where Demetria says her family has worshiped

for 75 years. While their demanding schedule means they often attend remotely, they returned in person for the church's Thanksgiving service this year and donated **100 “Thank U Jesus” T-shirts** to members.

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DON'T LOOK AWAY

Black Job Losses Are Sending a Warning

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

The unemployment rate for Black Americans is rising sharply, outpacing the broader labor market and reviving a familiar and troubling economic pattern.

In November 2025, Black unemployment climbed to 8.3 percent, according to federal labor data—nearly double the national rate of 4.6 percent. Just six months earlier, in May, Black unemployment stood at 6 percent, only modestly higher than the overall rate. Since then, the gap has widened dramatically, with Black joblessness rising more than five times faster than unemployment overall.

This surge comes after years of progress. During the long post-pandemic recovery, Black unemployment fell to historic lows, reaching an all-time low of 4.8 percent in April 2023. The gap between Black and white unemployment narrowed, reinforcing hopes that sustained economic growth

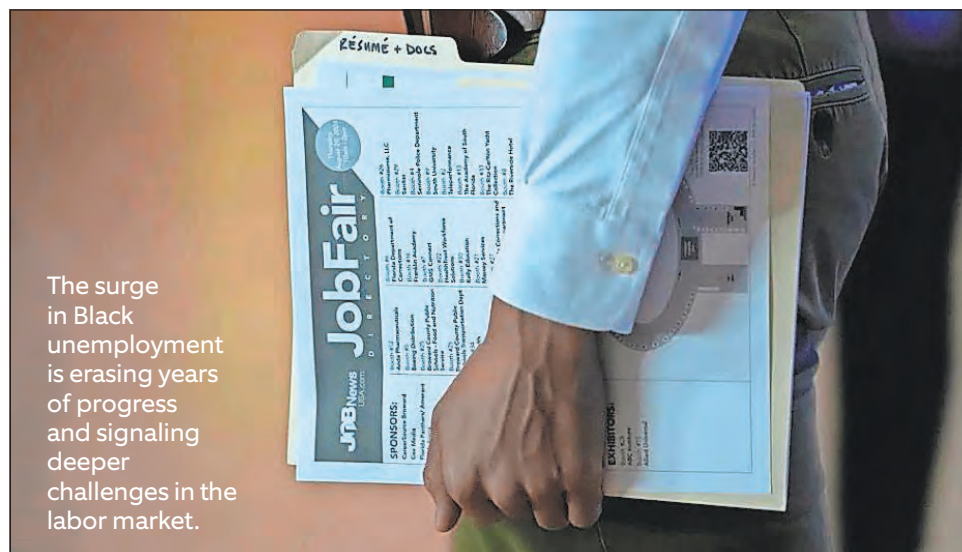
could finally weaken one of the most persistent inequities in the U.S. labor market.

That progress is now rapidly unraveling.

Historically, Black unemployment rises first when the economy slows—and recovers last when growth returns. During the Great Recession, Black unemployment routinely exceeded 10 percent and peaked above 13 percent between 2009 and 2011. Those double-digit rates wiped out wealth gains and destabilized families for years, with long-lasting consequences in housing, education, and health.

Economists say the current surge mirrors early warning signs seen before deeper economic downturns.

One key factor is where Black workers are concentrated in the labor force. Black Americans are disproportionately employed in public sector jobs and cyclical industries such as transportation, logistics, retail, and manufacturing—sectors that tend to shed



jobs quickly when demand slows.

Federal workforce reductions are playing a role. Since January 2025, federal employment has declined by more than 270,000 jobs. Nearly one in five federal workers is Black, compared to about 13 percent of the overall workforce, making these cuts particularly disruptive for Black households that relied on government jobs

as a stable pathway to the middle class.

Corporate layoffs have compounded the impact. Major employers across retail, shipping, media, and technology have announced job cuts throughout 2025 as companies respond to higher costs, slower consumer spending, and economic uncertainty. Tariff expansions have raised input prices for manufacturers and

distributors, prompting hiring freezes and layoffs that ripple through supply chains where Black workers are heavily represented.

In just months, years of gains have been erased. The result is a labor market that increasingly looks like two separate realities. This matters beyond any single community. Black unemployment has long functioned as a leading

economic indicator, signaling broader weakness before it shows up elsewhere. When Black workers are losing jobs at this pace, it is rarely an isolated problem.

For families, the consequences are immediate: lost income, increased housing insecurity, delayed education plans, and reduced access to health care. Black workers also tend to experience longer periods of unemployment, increasing the risk that short-term job losses turn into long-term economic setbacks.

As the nation heads into 2026, policymakers face a critical question: Is this spike a temporary adjustment or the early stage of a deeper economic downturn? History suggests that without deliberate intervention, Black communities will once again bear the heaviest burden of economic contraction.

The data is clear. The challenge now is whether leaders are willing to respond before the damage becomes permanent.

Louisville's 'Greatest' to Be Honored With USPS Forever Stamp in 2026

By Voice News Service

Muhammad Ali — boxing champion, humanitarian and global icon — will be honored with two commemorative Forever stamps issued by the U.S. Postal Service in 2026, fulfilling a longtime dream of “The Greatest.”

The USPS announced the stamps will go on sale **January 15, 2026, in Louisville, Kentucky**, with a first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony planned in the city. Customers may also preorder the stamps online.

The stamps feature a 1974 photograph of Ali in his signature boxing stance and were designed by USPS art director **Antonio**

Alcalá. Two versions will be released, using the same image in different layouts and color treatments, with “ALI” and “THE GREATEST” prominently displayed.

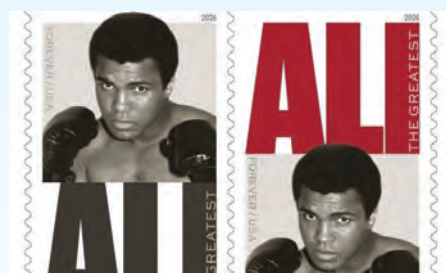
Ali once joked that such an honor was inevitable, famously saying, “*I should be a postage stamp, because that’s the only way I’ll ever get licked.*” Officials with the **Muhammad Ali Center** say they have worked for years to see that vision realized.

Born **Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr.** in Louisville, Ali became a three-time heavyweight champion and one of the most influential figures of the 20th century. Beyond the ring, he used his platform to speak out on civil rights, religious freedom, peace and humanitarian causes. In

1998, he was named a **United Nations Messenger of Peace**, and in 2005 he received the **Presidential Medal of Freedom**.

Louisville remains central to Ali’s legacy through the **Muhammad Ali Center**, a downtown museum and cultural hub dedicated to his life and values. The center offers interactive exhibits, educational programming and leadership development focused on confidence, service and social responsibility, attracting visitors from around the world.

While some readers may wonder whether Ali’s stamp is part of the USPS **Black Heritage series**, it is not. The **2026 Black Heritage stamp** will honor **Phillis**



Wheatley Peters, an 18th-century poet and the first African American to publish a book of poetry. Enslaved as a child, Wheatley achieved international recognition for her work but died in poverty at just **31 years old** — a legacy that will be explored more fully in a future story.



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Sale Marks a Meaningful Shift for Wichita's Black Community

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in-Chief

After more than 30 years as a fixture in Wichita, Sunmart Beauty Supply is entering a new chapter—one that carries deep meaning for a community long shaped by both dependence on, and distance from, the beauty supply industry.

The store has been purchased by Dr. Kneeland C. Brown and his family, marking one of the rare instances of a Black family owning a beauty supply store in Wichita.

That is why word of the purchase spread quickly—and why it was met with excitement across social media—where many celebrated the moment as affirming and long overdue.

Why Ownership Matters

For many Black residents, the news lands with more than celebration—it lands with pride.

Black hair and skin care are deeply cultural, tied to identity, self-expression, and dignity. Yet for decades, most beauty supply stores serving Black customers have been owned by people outside the community, and the shopping experience has not always felt positive.

That is why news of the purchase resonated so deeply—and why it was met with excitement across social media, where many celebrated the purchase of the store by a Black family as both meaningful and long overdue.

A Vision Years in the Making

Dr. Brown says the idea of owning a beauty supply store is something he had contemplated for years. Even before Sunmart became a possibility, he had been intentionally preparing for ownership in the African-American hair and skin care retail

space—recognizing both the industry's potential earnings and its deep cultural importance.

That long-term vision intersected with opportunity nearly two years ago during a visit to Sunmart with his wife, **Tearrah**. As she shopped, Brown asked the store's owner, **Seong Lee**, whether he had ever considered selling. Brown left his card without expectations.

Lee kept it.

Nearly a year later, after prayer and reflection, Lee reached out. The sale closed in November, with ownership transferring just before Thanksgiving.

Mr. Lee's Legacy

Seong Lee's tenure at Sunmart spans roughly three decades. He and his family—his wife and sons—often served as the store's primary employees. Customers consistently describe Sunmart as clean, well-organized, and comparably more welcoming than other beauty supply stores in the local market.

Over the years, Lee developed friendly relationships with many longtime customers. He acknowledges that his approach to customer service has evolved as his faith deepened.

He begins each day at his church's prayer service. **When he prays, he always prays that his store be a place where customers are treated with care and respect, and that those who walk through the doors feel welcomed rather than judged.**

Lee came to the United States from Korea to attend college in California. His parents remain in Korea and are now in their 90s. With his youngest son graduating from high school this spring, Lee determined the time was right for a transition. He plans to return to Korea and has agreed to help support the transition as Brown learns the business.



Dr. Kneeland C. Brown and his wife Tearrah are the new owners of Sun Mart Beauty Supply in Wichita, the purchase was effective in late November.



Mr. Seong Lee, who operated Sun Mart for 30 years, is staying on through the end of January to help Dr. Brown with the transition.

Faith, Family, and Foundation

Raised in California, Brown grew up watching his father, **Pastor Charles A. Brown**, pastor a church while also owning and operating a mattress and waterbed business. His mother, **Lady Bonnie P. Brown**, anchored the family in faith and discipline.

Together, they modeled how **ministry, entrepreneurship, and a strong family** could coexist.

Brown attended **Azusa Pacific University**, where he earned his undergraduate degree in business and later received his master's degree from the school's graduate seminary program. He later earned a doctorate in educational leadership from the **University of Southern California**.

After college, Brown began a career as a university administrator. After several moves, he and Tearrah prayed the next stop would be a place they could call home.

That place became Wichita.

Called to Community

The Brown family arrived in Wichita when Dr. Brown was hired as chief administrator at a local Christian school. Early on, they connected with Tabernacle Bible Church and quickly found not only a place of worship, but a church family that welcomed them and supported their growing connection to Wichita.

When longtime pastor Lincoln Montgomery became ill, Brown began volunteering at the church assisting where needed—often in the pulpit.

After Montgomery's death, Brown served one year as interim pastor before being called as the church's permanent pastor, a role he has held for two years.

Always bi-vocational, Brown continued to operate his own consulting business and he also teaches Business courses at Friends University.

With the purchase of Sunmart, Brown is stepping further into the balance between ministry and entrepreneurship. Similar to his father, he sees the purchase as something that strengthens his ability to lead and pastor effectively by keeping him grounded in the real-life challenges and experiences of the people he serves.

The Future of Sunmart

The Browns are raising seven children—five boys and two girls. The oldest child, a daughter, will graduate from high school this spring. She and one brother attend East High School. One son is in middle school, and the four youngest attend Urban Prep Academy, a Christian private school in northeast Wichita. The youngest child is their second daughter.

Brown expects family

“We’re not passing through. We’re building something here.”

DR. KNEELAND C. BROWN

members—including his children—to pitch in at the store as part of learning responsibility, work ethic, and entrepreneurship. **However, he plans to hire a general manager and a team of supportive, knowledgeable employees with a strong focus on quality customer service**, ensuring the store operates professionally and consistently.

Sunmart has more than **100,000 items in its inventory**, reflecting the breadth and complexity of the products customers rely on. Brown readily acknowledges the learning curve ahead, saying that fully understanding the inventory—and how customers use those products—will take time.

Planned updates include a computerized point-of-sale system that will improve inventory tracking, reduce out-of-stock issues, identify sales trends, and help anticipate customer needs. A new website, online purchasing, local delivery, and shipping beyond Wichita are also planned.

A Lasting Commitment

For the Browns, the purchase represents permanence. **“We’re building something here.”**

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**Merry Christmas &
Happy New Year**



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*The Wichita (KS) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated
The Hon. Jennifer Jones, President*

Wichita's Sales Tax Vote Is Set — Now Voters Have Little Time to Get Informed

A fast-moving proposal now shifts responsibility to voters ahead of the March 3 vote.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief



Updates to Century II and the Bob Brown Convention Center are part of the project that would be funded by the 1-cent sales tax Wichita citizens will vote on March 3.

The Wichita City Council has voted unanimously to place a proposed **1-cent city sales tax** before voters in a **special election scheduled for March 3**. With that vote complete, the question is no longer whether the issue will go to the ballot — but whether residents will have enough time to understand what's being proposed before they are asked to decide.

If approved, the temporary sales tax would last **seven years** and then sunset — similar to the temporary sales tax that helped finance the downtown **Intrust Bank Arena**. City officials estimate the tax could

generate roughly **\$850 million** during that period. Because the proposal moved quickly from development to council approval, residents now face a short window to learn what is included, why city leaders supported it, and how it could affect different communities.

How the Proposal Reached the Council

The sales tax proposal originated with **Wichita Forward**, a coalition launched by **three local business**

leaders that later expanded to include about 50 community members. The group says it surveyed roughly 500 residents to identify priorities and crafted a package focused on public safety, housing and homelessness, downtown facilities, and property-tax relief.

Once presented to the City Council, the proposal advanced rapidly. Some residents criticized the process, saying community input came too late and questioning whether a business-led coalition

should shape a plan of this scale.

Despite those concerns, the City Council voted 7–0 to send the proposal to voters, citing **long-term budget pressures and looming funding gaps** the city is expected to face in the coming years.

Why the Council Supported Moving It Forward

Outgoing District 1 Councilmember Brandon Johnson said he supported advancing the proposal because Wichita is approaching a financial crossroads as **federal pandemic relief funding expires** and costs continue to rise.

Much of that funding came through the **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, which provided cities with one-time dollars used in Wichita to support services such as homelessness response, housing stability, and other community needs. Those funds must be fully spent by 2026 and cannot be replaced once they are gone.

“We’ve been relying on one-time money,” Johnson said. “When that

runs out, either we cut services, delay critical projects, or we figure out how to pay for them.”

Johnson also pointed to the cost of financing major capital projects. Paying for fire stations, fire trucks, and other equipment through long-term bond issues would significantly increase costs due to interest.

“A sales tax allows the city to pay as it goes,” he said, arguing that it would cost residents less over time than issuing bonds and repaying them over decades.

What the Sales Tax Would Fund

Under the proposal, revenue would be allocated across four primary areas:

Public Safety and Housing/Homelessness — \$375 million

This includes funding for fire stations, emergency equipment and other public safety needs, as well as housing and homelessness services that could face funding gaps

See **VOTE** Page 23 →

KC Voters to Decide Fate of East-Side Development Sales Tax

The tax expires in 2027, with a potential April 2026 vote under discussion

By The Voice News Service

As Wichita voters prepare to consider a proposed sales tax this spring, Kansas City, Missouri is approaching a similar decision — one that could determine the future of a decade-long effort to reinvest in the city’s east side.

Kansas City’s **Central City Economic Development (CCED) sales tax**, a one-eighth-cent levy approved by voters in 2017, is nearing the end of its original **10-year term**, which expires in **2027**. City leaders are now discussing whether to ask voters to renew the tax, potentially as early as an **April 2026 election**.

Although CCED-funded projects are concentrated on the east side, **the sales tax itself is citywide**, meaning all **Kansas City, Missouri voters — not just residents within the district — will decide whether it continues**. Kansas City, Kansas residents do not vote

on the measure.

The CCED district generally stretches from **Ninth Street to Gregory Boulevard and from Indiana Avenue to Paseo Boulevard**, an area shaped by decades of redlining, disinvestment and low property appraisals. The tax was designed to provide gap funding — the final dollars needed to make projects financially feasible when construction costs exceeded what properties would appraise for.

The program’s early years moved slowly, as funding rounds were cautious and administrative capacity was limited. Over time, however, CCED has become an important tool for bridging financing gaps on east-side projects that likely would not have moved forward otherwise.

Among the better-known projects is **KD Academy**, a 24-hour childcare center along Prospect Avenue that supports families working nontraditional hours. Affordable housing developments such as the **Prospect Summit Duplexes** have added new units along key corridors. In the historic **18th & Vine Jazz District**, CCED support has helped advance residential projects including **The Parker** and **One Nine Vine**, strengthening the area’s

housing base near 19th and Vine. The long-stalled **Parade Park Homes redevelopment** has also received CCED assistance, helping move a project forward that had remained dormant for years.

Together, these investments reflect the tax’s core purpose: **helping make projects financially possible, stabilizing neighborhoods, and encouraging investment where it has long been lacking**.

City leaders have discussed placing a renewal measure on an **April 2026 ballot**, in part because spring or summer elections are often less crowded than major general elections and allow voters to focus on a single issue. To meet election deadlines and place the measure on an April ballot, **the Kansas City Council would need to approve ballot language by late 2025 or early 2026**.

If council action does not occur in time, the renewal question would likely be pushed to a later election date, such as **August or November 2026**. If voters ultimately reject the renewal — or if no vote occurs — the CCED sales tax would **expire at the end of its original term**, ending a dedicated funding source for east-side development.



Jazz Hill Apartments, a 200-unit affordable housing redevelopment along historic Paseo Boulevard, was completed in 2023–24 with support from the CCED sales tax, which helped close the project’s funding gap.

As with Wichita’s upcoming decision, the CCED vote asks a straightforward question: **should a small, citywide sales tax continue to be used to support targeted investment in neighborhoods that have long struggled to attract private financing on their own?**

Portions of this story were sourced from *Startland News*.



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Merry Christmas & Happy Holidays!





District 1
Council Member
Brandon Johnson



District 1
Council Member-Elect
Joseph Shepard



CITY OF WICHITA

Black Holiday Movies Are Now a Christmas Tradition

By The Voice Staff

For a growing audience, Christmas doesn't start with decorations or shopping lists—it starts when the first Black holiday movie hits the screen.

What was once a small niche has grown into a full-fledged seasonal genre. Black holiday movies now arrive each year in steady numbers, driven by consistent demand for stories centered on Black families, relationships, faith, and community. These films succeed not because they chase spectacle, but because they feel familiar: family gatherings that are joyful and messy, romances shaped by real life, church and music woven naturally into the season, and stories that leave room for healing alongside humor.

The expansion of the genre has been fueled by platforms that understand this audience. BET+, OWN, Lifetime, Amazon, Starz, and Peacock have embraced Black-led holiday storytelling, releasing new titles each season and turning them



We hope you have plenty of time, because more than a dozen new Black holiday movies have been released this year for your holiday enjoyment.

into annual viewing traditions. Lower budgets haven't limited impact; instead, repeat viewings and word-of-mouth have made these

films reliable performers and cultural touchstones.

This year's slate is especially robust, offering everything from romance and family drama to comedy and mystery—many featuring familiar faces audiences already trust. Together, these films reinforce why the genre continues to grow: viewers want holiday stories that reflect Black joy and Black reality without explanation or apology.

Below are some of the new Black holiday movies released this season and where to watch them.

New Black Holiday Movies to Watch This Season

Merry Little Baby (Peacock, streaming now): After a pact with her best friend falls apart, a woman turns to a sperm donor to have a baby before Christmas, only to face unexpected emotions and the possibility of love.

Christmas by Design (BET+, Nov. 20): A handbag designer teams up with an IT expert—and former holiday fling—after her charity

collection is sabotaged.

Son of the Preacher (BET+, Nov. 27): A beauty entrepreneur and a preacher's son navigate business, faith, and romance.

Love After Holidays (BET+, Dec. 4): A former talk show host confronts addiction, loss, and healing during the Christmas season.

Never Alone for Christmas: Memphis (BET+, Dec. 11): Two strangers find connection and possibility during an unexpected holiday stay in Memphis.

Vera's Holiday Flop (BET+, Dec. 18): A high school reunion brings emotional reckoning, forgiveness, and renewed joy.

A Soulful Christmas (BET+, Dec. 25): The children of feuding R&B icons remake a holiday song and discover harmony in more ways than one.

Unexpected Christmas (Starz, streaming now): A family gathering unravels when secrets surface and surprise guests arrive.

Christmas Everyday (Lifetime, Nov. 29): A grieving daughter leans

on faith and family while navigating holiday pressures.

The Christmas Campaign (Lifetime, Nov. 29): Rival ad executives discover chemistry while collaborating on a holiday pitch.

Deck the Hallways (Lifetime, Dec. 6): Returning home restores tradition, love, and a sense of belonging.

Fake Yourself a Merry Little Christmas (OWN, Nov. 29): A small lie pulls a professor into holiday chaos—and romance.

Very Merry Mystery (OWN, Dec. 13): A beauty shop owner helps solve a holiday disappearance.

Tyler Perry's Finding Joy (Amazon, streaming now): A snowstorm forces a fashion designer to rethink love and ambition.

#WorstChristmasEver (Amazon Prime Video/Tubi): A blended family Christmas leads to healing and second chances.

Christmas for the Soul (Plex/Tubi): A soul-food chef navigates faith, power, and family secrets during the holidays.

HARDINGS, from Page 3 ↓

Giving back—by choice

Despite global success, Wichita remains home—and a place Harding chooses to give back to.

He sponsored a large basketball takeover at Wichita Sports Forum that drew about **5,000 people**, and he has hosted **two annual holiday**

toy giveaways in northeast Wichita. This year's giveaway, held at the Boys & Girls Club, drew a line that wrapped around the building, with people waiting nearly **two hours** to get inside.

For many, the giveaway wasn't really about the gift.

After being lucky enough to score a photo with D'Aydrian,

one young fan summed it up: **"That's what I came for."**

Why it works

Harding's fan base skews young, but it is broad and diverse, including parents, adults, and fans **across racial and cultural lines**, both in the U.S. and abroad.

The appeal is simple and

elusive at the same time. He's unpredictable, high-energy, and unapologetically himself. His phrases—"Ziggly Bop," "Boshkalay Bong Bong," and playful references like "67"—don't really mean anything, and that's exactly the point. They feel like inside language, shared humor, and community.



D'Aydrian Harding squats to take a photo with a young fan clutching his toy during the family's holiday giveaway in northeast Wichita.

His family says he has always been this way—funny as a child, constantly performing, and deeply attached to his mom.

In an industry built on fleeting attention, the Hardings are building something

sturdier: a business grounded in family, faith, discipline, and community.

And that may be the real reason D'Aydrian Harding's success continues to grow—long after the viral moment that started it all.

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As Brandon Johnson Exits Council, His Imprint on District 1 Is Clear

Eight years of steady leadership brought transformation to District 1 — and set the stage for what comes next.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

As his final month on the Wichita City Council unfolded, District 1 Councilmember Brandon Johnson found himself closing out his tenure much the way he spent the last eight years — managing complex issues, balancing community expectations, and navigating decisions that will shape the city long after he leaves office in January.

In his final weeks, Johnson cast some of his last votes, including advancing a proposed 1-cent city sales tax to go before Wichita voters and approving funding for improvements to A. Price Woodard Park, named in honor of Wichita's first Black mayor. But those debates represent only a small part of a broader legacy Johnson built over two four-year terms representing one of Wichita's most historically significant and diverse districts.

District 1 has long been represented by influential Black leaders, including LaVonta



The swearing in of Johnson in January 2018

Williams, Rip Gooch, George Rogers and Carl Brewer, who shaped the city during periods of change. Johnson sees his service as part of that continuum.

"I viewed my opportunity to serve on Council as a way to make change in two ways," Johnson said, describing his work in terms of tangible projects and systemic reforms.

A Defining Achievement: McAdams Park and the Brewer Community Center

When asked to reflect on his proudest accomplishment, Johnson consistently returns to

McAdams Park and the Carl G. Brewer Community Center — projects that together reshaped a cornerstone of District 1.

Johnson first ran for office amid controversy over the possible closure of McAdams Pool. At the time, the plan was to eliminate the pool and replace it with a splash pad. Johnson campaigned on preserving and improving the facility — and delivered.

Instead of a splash pad or simply maintaining an aging pool, the city invested in a modern, state-of-the-art aquatic facility. That decision became the catalyst for a broader transformation of McAdams Park into a destination park serving the entire city.

Under Johnson's leadership, the park saw:

- Barry Sanders Football Field improvements
- Goose Doughty Tennis Court upgrades
- Rob Thurman Baseball Field improvements
- New baseball fields
- The renovation and expansion of the Carl G. Brewer Community Center

The center's opening this month — just weeks before



Among his many accomplishments, Johnson counts the investment in McAdams Park particularly the new Brewer Recreation Center that opened earlier this month.

Johnson leaves office — stands as a capstone achievement. As part of the project's planning, the city reached an agreement with FEMA to remove the 15th Street bridge and its supporting pillars along the canal route. That agreement removed the new center, McAdams Park and nearly 400 nearby homes from the floodplain.

A new pedestrian bridge is planned at that location to restore access to the park along 15th Street.

Parks, Arts and Neighborhood Investment

Beyond McAdams, Johnson was a consistent advocate for parks and arts investment across District 1.

Those efforts included improvements at Fairmount and Glen Dey parks, upgrades to Edgemoor Park's water playground and facilities, and renovations to MacDonald Golf Course. One disappointment, Johnson acknowledges, was not being able to complete planned

youth football fields at Glen Dey Park — a project he hopes his successor will continue.

Johnson also supported Wichita's 2% for the Arts ordinance, which requires 2% of public construction budgets to be spent on public art. The policy created meaningful opportunities for local and minority artists to receive paid commissions and led to greater representation and visible cultural investment, including artwork featured throughout the new Brewer Community Center.

Roads, Libraries and Infrastructure

Johnson's tenure also coincided with significant infrastructure investment.

He supported the creation of the Concrete Street Repair Fund, helped increase street maintenance funding by \$10 million annually, and backed major road projects in District 1, including improvements to 17th Street from Broadway to Hillside, resurfacing of Grove

Street, and the paving of several dirt roads.

Library improvements were another priority, including the renovation and expansion of the Maya Angelou and Rockwell branch libraries and the creation of the Dr. Ronald W. Waters Branch Library.

Leadership Style: Quiet, Deliberate, and Guarded

Johnson describes his leadership style as intentionally cautious — a mindset shaped by years of watching projects stall or collapse under public expectations.

His approach, he said, was to keep plans close until success was certain.

"I'd rather under-promise and over-deliver," he explained, noting that premature announcements can derail negotiations, funding or partnerships.

That style sometimes drew criticism from residents who wanted more transparency

See **IMPRINT** Page 14 →



Family is important, you can see it in the numerous photos on his social media channels.

Historic Inauguration Installs Christal Watson as KCK Mayor

The inauguration ceremony for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County–Kansas City, Kansas, was held Monday, Dec. 15, at Memorial Hall in downtown KCK, marking the official installation of Christal Watson as the city's first Black female mayor.

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in-Chief

Watson's inauguration builds on a political moment voters first initiated four years ago with the election of Tyrone Garner as Kansas City, Kansas' first Black mayor. While Garner entered office with strong public support and a people-driven agenda, persistent conflicts with the County Commission often stalled progress. Watson's election represents the community's renewed effort to move that agenda forward—this time with expectations of greater alignment and momentum, particularly with three new commissioners joining the governing body.

Watson, who was elected in November in a widely watched upset, won the mayor's race without endorsements from the city's long-established political machine. Supporters credited with powering her grassroots victory filled Memorial Hall to witness the swearing-in.

The ceremony also reflected growing regional ties, with several Kansas City, Missouri, elected officials and civic leaders in attendance, signaling an expanded

relationship between the two cities. Kansas City, Missouri, Mayor Quinton Lucas attended, along with Mayor Pro Tem Ryanna Parks-Shaw, who has announced her bid to replace Lucas when his term expires in July 2027, and Jackson County Prosecutor Melesa Johnson.

Other officials sworn into office during the ceremony included Andrew Davis and Chuck Stites, who were installed for second terms on the Wyandotte County Commission. Dr. Carlos Pacheco II, Jermaine Howard, and Andrew Tyler Kump were sworn in for their first four-year terms as county commissioners. Wyandotte County Sheriff Daniel Soptic was also sworn in for another term.

Watson, whose swearing-in closed the evening, was sworn in by Wyandotte County District Judge Candice Alcaraz. Standing with her during the ceremony were her four sons, her husband—who held the Bible during the oath—and her mother, who traveled from Florida to attend. Additional family members also made the trip to Kansas City, Kansas, for the historic occasion.



Mayor sworn in Christal Watson was sworn in as the Mayor of KCK by Judge Candice Alcaraz. She was joined on stage by her husband Bryan H. Watson, who held the Bible while she took the oath, her four sons and her mother.



Sworn into office for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County, Kansas City, KS were (L-R) Church Stites, District 7; Dr. Carlos Pacheco II, District 5; Andrew Davis, District 8; Christal Watson, Mayor; Jermaine Howard, District 1, Andrew Tyler Kump, District 2 At-Large; and Daniel Soptic, Sheriff.



Commissioner Andrew Davis, who was sworn in for his second term in office, pictured with his wife Andrea.



Dignitaries, including many from across the stateline, attended the swearing in (L-R) Wyandotte County Chief Deputy District Attorney Damon Mitchell, Wyandotte County District Judge Candice Alcaraz, Jackson County Prosecutor Melesa Johnson, Wyandotte County District Atty. Mark Dupree and KCMO Mayor Quinton Lucas.

Erik Murray Launches Bid for U.S. Senate in Kansas

Murray joins a growing list of Democratic contenders as he calls for practical solutions on health care, education, and the economy.

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

Kansas City, Kansas native **Erik Murray** has launched a campaign for the U.S. Senate, positioning himself as a pragmatic Democrat focused on revitalizing Kansas communities through targeted investment, economic development, and bipartisan problem-solving. Murray, a commercial real estate developer and entrepreneur, announced his candidacy on December 3.

Murray grew up in KCK, attended St. Patrick's Catholic School, and graduated from Sumner Academy before earning a scholarship to the University of Southern California. In college, he met his wife, Nicole, and after graduation the couple returned to Kansas City, where they lived for a decade and began raising their four children. In 2015, they relocated to California so Nicole could spend time near her family. But by 2023, Murray said the call of home — aging parents, deep community ties, and the desire for his younger two children to attend Sumner Academy — drew them back. Today, **two of the couple's four children** are third-generation Sumner students.

Returning home also meant taking on major redevelopment work, including the long-awaited reimagining of **Indian Springs**. Murray's plan includes mixed-income housing, innovation and workforce components, childcare, and neighborhood amenities. But he stresses the project's core: **affordable, long-term sustainable housing powered by a solar micro-grid designed to eliminate utility bills for residents**. He expects



Erik Murray, a developer and Kansas City native, announced his bid to be the Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate from Kansas. If he advances out of the August primary, he will face off against Senator Roger Marshall.

final approvals under new county leadership early in 2026, with construction targeted to begin by summer.

Murray is also leading the newly approved project to develop the **final 22 acres at Wheeler Downtown Airport** in Kansas City, Missouri. Although the project includes traditional aviation uses, Murray frames its purpose around building workforce pathways in aviation and STEM fields for young people. "Jets and hangars will take care of themselves," he said. "What

matters is using that infrastructure to create opportunity."

Why He's Running

Murray says he entered the Senate race because Washington leaders — particularly Sen. Roger Marshall — are failing Kansans on the issues that matter most: costs, health care, education, infrastructure, and rural vitality. He points to Marshall's votes to cut health care, reduce support for public schools, and actions that critics say contributed to rural hospital closures.

"I'm fed up with politicians who aren't working for us," Murray said in his launch announcement. "Kansans deserve someone focused on opportunity, education, health care, and lowering costs — not partisan games."

He describes himself as a **moderate, practical Democrat** who believes Kansas voters are united on core priorities: jobs, affordability, strong public schools, accessible health care, and policies that help families build stability.

A Growing Democratic Field

Murray joins a Democratic primary that already includes several candidates:

- **Christy Davis**, a former USDA Rural Development state director from Cottonwood Falls who previously ran for Congress and emphasizes rural investment.
- **Sandy Spidel Neumann**, a retired financial services executive highlighting economic stability and cost-of-living concerns.
- **Anne Parelkar**, an Overland Park immigration attorney whose personal connection to immigration issues shapes her platform.

- **Mike Soetaert**, a Wellington business owner and repeat Democratic filer known for grassroots-focused messaging.

None of the Democratic candidates have previously held elected office, and with the statewide filing deadline not until **June 2026**, the field could still grow. But Murray notes that Senate races require significant fundraising and organization, meaning "serious candidates need to step forward early."

A Competitive Landscape

Marshall enters the race with high unfavorable and sustained protests over his voting record, creating what Democrats see as a rare opening in Kansas.

Recent Democratic momentum — including Gov. Laura Kelly's two statewide victories — has added to that optimism.

Murray argues that his development experience gives him a practical understanding of how policy can drive investment across all 105 counties. "You have the power of policy and the power of the purse," he said, "and Kansas needs a Senator who knows how to use both to create opportunity."

Election Calendar

Primary Election: Tuesday, August 4, 2026
General Election: Tuesday, November 3, 2026
Candidate Filing Deadline: June 1, 2026

Murray plans to campaign statewide — from the Kansas City metro to rural western counties — arguing that Kansas needs a leader who understands both urban and rural concerns and can rebuild trust in federal leadership.

IMPRINT, from Page 12 ↓

earlier in the process. Johnson acknowledges that tension but believes the results justify the approach.

What Didn't Get Done

Johnson is candid about unfinished work. Beyond Glen Dey Park's youth football fields, he hoped to do more in housing during his tenure. In 2024, he helped secure passage of a landlord retaliation ordinance allowing the city to fine landlords who punish tenants for reporting unsafe conditions.

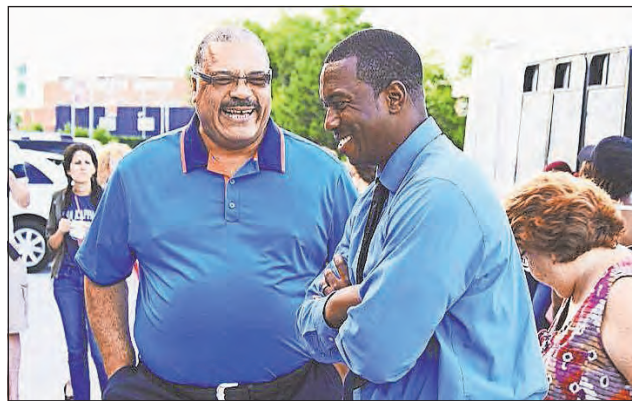
Still, Johnson said he was disappointed he was unable

to get a broader package of reforms — including more punitive measures targeting chronic problem landlords — across the finish line before leaving office.

On Johnson's Legacy

Incoming District 1 Councilmember Joseph Shepard, who will replace Johnson in January, credits Johnson with laying groundwork that future leaders can build upon.

Shepard said Johnson's focus on parks, infrastructure and long-term investments strengthened the district and created momentum that should continue, noting that



Former Wichita Mayor Carl Brewer and Johnson share a laugh. Brewer was a role model and mentor for Johnson.

many of Johnson's projects will shape District 1 for decades.

Former District 1 Councilmember LaVonta

Williams said she watched Johnson grow into the role and develop into an effective leader.

What's Next

When asked what comes next, Johnson didn't offer specifics — but he was clear about two things: earning "real money" after years of public service and continuing to serve in ways that create impact.

Whether that service comes through business, advocacy or another public-facing role remains to be seen.

Williams, who remains active in the community, said she expects the same continued engagement from Johnson.

"Once we leave those offices, there's still so much to do, and I know we will see Brandon out there in the community working for us for years to

come," she said.

Closing

As Johnson prepares to step away from elected office, his imprint on District 1 is visible in parks, roads, libraries, public art and neighborhood infrastructure. His legacy is not defined by a single vote or policy debate, but by a steady accumulation of changes — some highly visible, others quietly structural — that reshaped the district he represented.

For District 1, the next chapter begins in January. But the foundation Johnson leaves behind will influence what comes next.

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As ACA Subsidies Appear Unlikely, Many Are Looking for Health Care They Can Still Afford

With insurance costs rising, experts point to lower-cost care options outside hospital ERs

By Voice Health Service

With Congress struggling to reach an agreement on extending Affordable Care Act subsidies and the enrollment window already closed, many Americans are beginning the new year without the financial help that once made health insurance affordable.

For some, this is a sudden change. For others, it's familiar territory.

People who relied on enhanced ACA subsidies may now face premiums they simply can't manage. At the same time, many individuals who never qualified for subsidies because of income levels — but still found coverage unaffordable — remain uninsured or underinsured. As costs rise, more people are asking the same question: *If*

Option	Best for	Covers routine care	Covers medications	Covers emergencies	Typical cost
ACA Insurance	Comprehensive coverage	✓	✓	✓	\$\$\$
Direct Primary Care	Ongoing primary care	✓	Some	✗	\$\$
Limited-Benefit/Wellness Programs	Support & discounts	Some	✓	✗	\$-\$\$
Urgent Care/Retail Clinics	Occasional illness	✗	Some	✗	Pay-per-visit
Community Health Centers	Low-income care	✓	Some	✗	Sliding scale
Telehealth Subscriptions	Quick virtual access	Some	Some	✗	\$

full insurance isn't realistic right now, what are my other options for getting care?

While none of the alternatives fully replace comprehensive insurance, several models can help people stay connected to care, manage routine

health needs, and reduce costs — especially for those who are relatively healthy but still need medications, preventive care, or treatment for common illnesses.

Direct Primary Care: Paying for Access, Not Insurance

One option gaining attention is **Direct Primary Care (DPC)**. Instead of billing insurance, patients pay a flat monthly fee directly to a primary care doctor, typically ranging from \$60 to \$120 per month.

That fee usually covers office visits, preventive care, basic labs, and chronic condition

management. For people who need regular care for conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, or asthma, DPC can offer predictable costs and easier access.

However, DPC does not cover hospital care, emergency services, or surgery. Many patients use it alongside catastrophic insurance — or on its own, accepting the risk of major medical expenses.

Limited-Benefit and Wellness Programs

Another category includes **limited-benefit or wellness-based programs**, often offered through associations,

chambers of commerce, or employers. These programs typically bundle services such as telehealth access, mental health support, pharmacy discounts, and care navigation. Some also include supplemental insurance products like accident, critical illness, or life coverage.

These plans can help reduce everyday health expenses and provide support when navigating care, but they are not ACA-compliant insurance and do not cover hospitalization or major medical events. The key for consumers is

See **CARE** Page 23 →

Cleaver: Subsidy Extension Approval Likely in House, Senate Remains Hurdle

During a town hall call this week, Rep. Emanuel Cleaver said Democrats believe they have enough votes in the U.S. House to pass a bill extending ACA subsidies, with support from a small number of Republicans. Cleaver expects the measure to stall in the Senate but said a House vote could still force negotiations between the two chambers. He hopes that pressure will lead to a bipartisan compromise that extends subsidies and reopens enrollment for people who did not sign up due to cost concerns. However, any action wouldn't come until Congress returns next year from its holiday break.

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Merry Christmas

Happy New Year!

...And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

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PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

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Young participants in Kwanzaa Wichita help an elder light the kinara.

21st Annual Wichita Kwanzaa Celebration Centers Culture, Elders, and Community

By Voice News Service

The African American Council of Elders, in partnership with the NAACP Wichita Branch and The Center, will host the **21st Annual Kwanzaa Celebration** on **Friday, December 26, from 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**, at The Center, 1914 E. 11th St. N. in Wichita.

This annual gathering highlights culture, family, and intergenerational leadership, with a special focus on the **Enstoolment and Seating of New Elders**—a moment that honors wisdom, service, and continuity within the community.

The celebration will include drumming and dance performances, educational moments on the meaning of Kwanzaa, and a **communal lunch** featuring the event's signature Kuumba Salad, with attendees invited to bring their favorite salad toppings while organizers provide the greens. Children will also receive **Zawadi (gifts)** as part of the celebration.

Now in its third decade, the Wichita Kwanzaa observance continues to serve as a space for reflection, renewal, and reaffirmation of shared values rooted in African heritage.

The event is free and open to the public.

44th Annual Citywide Kwanzaa Celebration Honors Resilience Across Seven Days

By Voice News Service

The National Black United Front–Kansas City (NBUF-KC), in partnership with the American Jazz Museum, will host its **44th Annual Citywide Kwanzaa Celebration**, a long-running tradition that brings the community together for all seven days of Kwanzaa, from **December 26 through January 1**.

Most nightly programs, December 26–31, will be held at the historic **Gem Theater**, 1615 E. 18th St., in Kansas City, Missouri. Each evening begins promptly at **7 p.m.**, with an **African Marketplace** opening at **6 p.m.**, featuring vendors, artisans, crafts, and food. The final day, January 1, will take place at **Nefertiti Banquet Hall**, 1314 Quindaro Blvd., in **Kansas City, Kansas**, beginning at 3 p.m.

The 2025 theme, **“Triumph In A Time Of Crisis,”** reflects both historical and present-day realities. “We are a resilient people who have always fought for our liberation,” said Jawanza Hardy, Kwanzaa coordinator. “This celebration reminds us that struggle and triumph are part of our collective story.”

Each night highlights one of the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Principles of Kwanzaa:

December 26 – Umoja (Unity): Hosted by NBUF-KC and the Esoke Cultural Arts Center, whose youth performers will lead nightly processions throughout the celebration. The evening also includes the presentation of the Charles Miller Black Liberation Award to The Kansas City Defender for its advocacy and frontline work for justice.

December 27 – Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): Presented by Art In Motion



and the African Centered College Preparatory Academy (ACPREP) with “People of the Drum,” a powerful blend of music and dance directed by Danny Diallo Hinds.

December 28 – Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility): Hosted by Brothers Liberating Our Communities (BLOC), spotlighting arts integration in education and honoring arts educators and programs that strengthen student success.

December 29 – Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics): Led by the Music & More Foundation, featuring poets, visual artists, and musicians, hosted by Tyrone “Inkwell” Gethers Jr., and closing with Psalms 133 recited by TL Williams.

December 30 – Nia (Purpose): Hosted by A-Flat Music Studio Inc. and the A-Flat Youth Orchestra, with performances by special guest pianist Charles Williams, steel drummer Bryan Alford, and returning favorite Asa Barnes.

December 31 – Kuumba (Creativity): Hosted by the American Jazz Museum,



Kwanzaa Celebration in Kansas City is held the first six nights of Kwanza at the Gem Theater in the Jazz District. Admission is free

showcasing local jazz musicians in the heart of the 18th & Vine Jazz District.

January 1 – Imani (Faith): An afternoon program hosted by NBUF-KC featuring a video presentation by Kinda and Ajamu Webster who have been living in Ghana, West Africa, for the past three years. The Unity Feast will follow and everyone is encouraged to bring a dish for the Feast (no pork).

All events are free and open to the public.

What Is Kwanzaa? A Celebration of Culture, Values, and Collective Strength

By Voice News Service

Kwanzaa is a week-long cultural celebration observed from **December 26 through January 1**, honoring African heritage and African American culture. Founded in **1966** by **Dr. Maulana Karenga**, Kwanzaa was created to center community, collective responsibility, and cultural pride.

The foundation of Kwanzaa is the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Principles: **Umoja (Unity),**

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith). Each day focuses on one principle, encouraging reflection and action that strengthen families and communities.

Kwanzaa takes its name from the Kiswahili phrase meaning “first fruits of the harvest,” drawing inspiration from traditional African harvest celebrations. The observance



emphasizes togetherness over individualism and encourages people to honor the past, assess the present, and commit to building a stronger future.

Celebrated through cultural programs, shared meals, storytelling, music, and art, Kwanzaa remains a time of renewal, education, and unity.



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Carlos Dwayne Love, 46
September 8, 1979 - December 16, 2025
A memorial service will be scheduled at a later date

Lola Mae Simmons, 92
May 2, 1933 - Dec. 1, 2025
Service was held on Dec. 19 at Strangers Rest Baptist Church.

Anthony L. Kirkendoll, 50
January 13, 1975 - December 15, 2025
Service will be held at 1 pm on Sat, Dec. 27, 2025 at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 220 W. 13th.

Jessica Young, 67
April 13, 1958 - Nov. 26, 2025
Service was held on Dec. 20 at Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Cherl L. Becker - Henderson, 63
September 21, 1962 - December 2, 2025
Memorial Service scheduled at a later date.

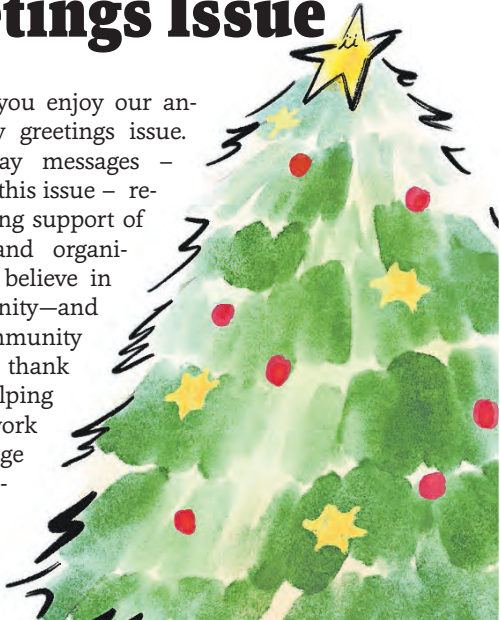
Dorothy Gene Daugherty - McNair, 78
June 23, 1947 - Nov. 21, 2025
Service will be held at 1 pm Jan 9, 2026 atb Thomas and Jones Funeral Home, Las Vegas, Nevada

Ashton Josiah Cook, 3
November 21, 2022 - December 1, 2025
Service was held on Thur., Dec. 18 at the Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

Charles Edward Satterfield, 83
March 3, 1942 - Nov. 12, 2025
Service was held on Dec. 15 at Winfield Veterans Cemetery, Winfield, KS

Our Annual Holiday Greetings Issue

We hope you enjoy our annual holiday greetings issue. These holiday messages – through out this issue – reflect the strong support of businesses and organizations that believe in our community—and in The Community Voice. We thank them for helping sustain our work and encourage you to support their work.



VOTE, from Page 9 ↓

as ARPA dollars expire.

Century II and Convention Facilities – \$250 million

Funds would be used to renovate Century II and and improve the Bob Brown Convention convention facilities in an effort to **attract conventions, events and other visitor-driven economic activity**, and to keep Wichita competitive with peer cities.

Property-Tax Relief – \$150 million

Supporters say this portion would help offset the impact of the sales tax by reducing property taxes.

Performing Arts Center – \$75 million

Seed funding for a new downtown performing arts center, paired with private fundraising.

The plan includes a citizen oversight

committee and annual audits to monitor spending.

Concerns About Equity and Priorities

Sales taxes are widely considered **regressive**, meaning they place a greater burden on low-income households. That concern has been central to criticism of the proposal, especially because the tax would apply broadly.

Kansas recently eliminated the **state sales tax on groceries**, but state law does **not exempt groceries from local sales taxes**. As a result, the proposed 1% city sales tax would apply to all taxable purchases, including groceries, restaurant meals and prepared food, with **no exemptions**.

Some council members and residents discussed the possibility of a **rebate program** that would return to low-income households the estimated cost of the additional sales tax on essentials like groceries – roughly \$50 to \$60 per year. No

formal rebate plan has been adopted.

Others objected to the **mix of projects included** in the package, saying they would have preferred to see more funding directed toward affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization and economic development in struggling parts of the city, including northeast Wichita.

A Short Timeline for a Big Decision

With the March 3 special election approaching, residents have little time to sort through competing arguments, funding details and long-term implications.

Supporters argue the sales tax is necessary to stabilize city finances, replace expiring federal funds and pay for critical needs without relying on long-term debt. Critics say the proposal moved too fast and does not reflect enough community input or equitable investment.

Either way, the decision now rests with voters – and the timeline leaves little room for disengagement.

CARE, from Page 16 ↓

understanding exactly what is – and is not – included before enrolling.

Urgent Care and Retail Clinics

For relatively healthy people who only need care occasionally, **urgent care centers and retail clinics** remain a common fallback. These clinics can treat colds, infections, minor injuries, and basic illnesses, usually on a self-pay basis.

Costs vary but often range from \$75 to \$200 per visit. While this pay-as-you-go approach avoids monthly premiums, expenses can add up quickly without ongoing care or discounts for medications.

Community Health Centers

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and community clinics continue to play a critical role for uninsured and underinsured patients. These non-profit clinics offer care on a sliding scale based on income and provide primary care, preventive services, and some mental health support regardless of insurance status.

Access can depend on location, and wait times may be longer, but for many families, these clinics are the most affordable way to receive consistent care.

Telehealth Subscriptions

Telehealth-only subscription services have also expanded. For a modest monthly fee or per-visit charge, patients can access virtual care for common



Hospital waiting room with people with medical appointment. GENARO DIAZ FOTOGRAFO

illnesses, prescription refills, and basic mental health support.

These services are best suited for people who rarely need in-person exams and want quick access for straightforward issues. They are not appropriate for emergencies or complex medical needs.

Managing Medication Costs

For people whose biggest expense is medication, pharmacy discount programs can offer meaningful savings. Programs such as discount cards, online pharmacies, and transparent pricing models can reduce costs for many generic medications – sometimes dramatically.

These programs don't replace medical care, but they can make prescriptions more affordable for people managing chronic conditions without insurance.

A Patchwork Reality – For Now

As Congress debates whether to revisit ACA subsidies after its break, millions of Americans are left making short-term decisions in a system that often requires patchwork solutions.

None of these options provide the full protection of comprehensive insurance. But for people navigating higher premiums, lost subsidies, or long-standing affordability challenges, understanding the differences can help prevent gaps in care – or costly misunderstandings.

The most important step is clarity: knowing whether a program provides medical care, financial protection, or simply access and discounts. In an uncertain policy environment, informed choices matter more than ever.

Jackson M O R T U A R Y

***IF YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME RIGHT NOW AND
IT FEELS LIKE GOD IS SILENT WHEN YOU NEED HIM THE MOST.***

***WE WANT TO REMIND YOU THAT THIS ISN'T THE PLACE
WHERE GOD HAS FORSAKEN YOU. THIS IS THE PLACE
WHERE GOD IS MAKING YOU. HE WILL NEVER LEAVE
YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU. STAY ENCOURAGED! MAY
THE WARMTH OF BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES GENTLY
FILL THE LONELY PLACE IN YOUR HEART.***

THINKING OF YOU DURING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

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