

# THE VOICE

A Trusted Voice From The Community's Perspective



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COLLEGE, CAREERS, CREDENTIALS

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Funding Awarded for Testing Residents  
In Groundwater Contaminated Area

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# THE VOICE

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 23  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025

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### 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 alumnae

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/](http://communityvoiceks.com/) click on more

### Last Call: Share the Cheer Christmas Greetings

Our annual Christmas greetings section is your chance to thank customers, supporters, family, or the community for being part of your 2025 journey.

This year the section will be in our Dec. 12 issue and **every person, business, or organization that purchases a greeting will be entered to win a FREE 2026 advertising package.** All ads also include an online post for added visibility.

Don't miss your chance to be part of this festive tradition and support The Voice at the same time.

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### CHRISTMAS SOCIAL



### Join Us Dec. 11: Christmas Social & Fundraiser

You're invited to our **Christmas Social** on **Thursday, Dec. 11**, at Elizabeth's Lounge (see ad page 3). Come enjoy music, dancing, community, a cash bar—and help support The Voice. A **minimum \$5 donation** is requested at the door, and **100% of admission benefits The Community Voice.**

This event is part of our ongoing fundraising campaign. As we shared in our recent email, *we want to be honest—keeping The Community Voice going right now is a struggle.* If you value the work we do, this is a meaningful and joyful way to show your support. Your generosity truly helps keep this publication going. If you can't make the event, PLEASE—still donate—online at [communityvoiceks.com/](http://communityvoiceks.com/). There's a donate button on our front page.

### 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](http://communityvoiceks.com))
- Email flyers/information to [guillory@tcvpub.com](mailto: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.

### Love Is in the Air: Couples Needed for Our Feb. 6 Issue

One of our most popular traditions

returns—The Voice's Annual Love Couples Issue is February 6. We're seeking legally married couples of all ages, from newlyweds to those celebrating 50 years or more.

If you, or a couple you know, has a love story that shines, submit their info. Deadline: January 23, 2026 (early submissions encouraged) Submit at: [communityvoiceks.com/](http://communityvoiceks.com/) click on more for love couples



### And This Is Only the Beginning

We're just getting started. With The Voice entering its 30th anniversary year, 2026 will bring even more special features, events, community campaigns, and opportunities for you to participate.

If you need more information on any project listed above, reach out—we're here to help.

Together, we can make 2026 our strongest year yet.

# A BUSY SEASON AT THE VOICE

# Get Involved

PLEASE JOIN US FOR A  
**CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**  
 & FUNDRAISER BENEFITING  
**THE VOICE**

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ISAIAH 6:9      JOHN 1:14

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# Generations of Care on Prospect: KD Academy's Next Chapter

After redefining childcare for Kansas City's 24-hour workforce with support from the Central City Economic Development (CCED) Sales Tax Program, Myron McCant is expanding KD Academy into Ageless Adventures. This adult day program brings elder care under one roof. The result is a living example of neighborhood-based economic development that begins and ends with people.

By Brian Escobar

Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City

On Prospect Avenue, one building is quietly rewriting what progress looks like. Inside KD Academy, children arrive at all hours so their parents can work hospital shifts, drive buses, stock warehouses, and keep the city moving. Soon, those same families will find support for their parents and loved ones in the very same place.

KD Academy's journey is also part of a larger story unfolding in the Third District — one made possible by the Central City Economic Development (CCED) Sales Tax Program, which invests in community-led projects that fill essential gaps in daily life.

## KD Academy: A Working Family's Anchor

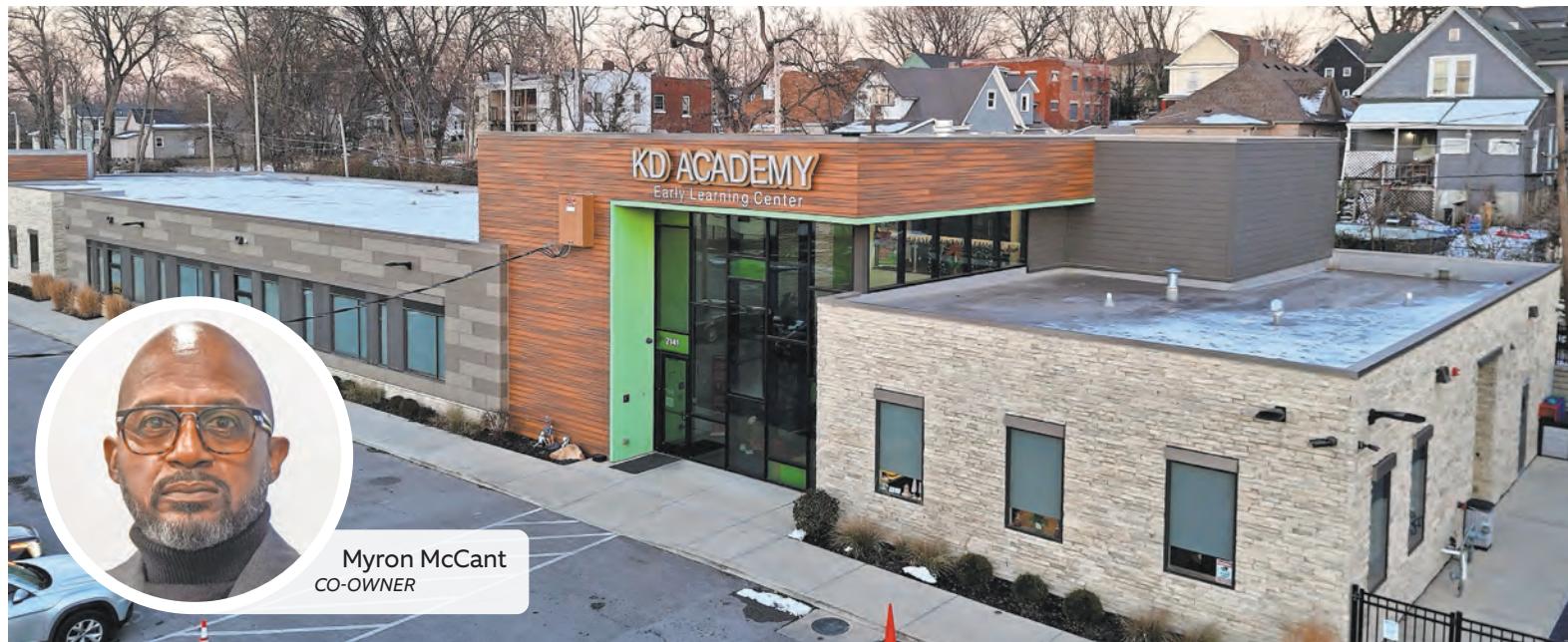
KD Academy began as a simple idea with powerful consequences: a reliable home for kids that allowed working parents to remain in the workforce. Very quickly, McCant realized he was building more than a childcare center — he was building workforce infrastructure, the kind of social backbone that keeps households stable and employers staffed.

"We have exceeded our expectations," McCant says, reflecting on the growth since 2020. "What we originally conceptualized has magnified four times. Credit goes to our culture and our staff — they made it possible."

## From Childcare to Ageless Adventures

The next chapter grew out of life at home. McCant and his wife both served as caregivers for aging parents, juggling pharmacies, specialists, and daily needs while searching for reliable respite options.

"What we found was long waiting



KD Academy at 21st and Prospect was one of the early success stories of the Central City Economic Development sales tax. Now the McCants are expanding, adding Ageless Adventures, an adult day program at the same location.

lists, and places that did not meet our standards," McCant recalls. "We started asking what it would look like to build something better."

Ageless Adventures will offer occupational therapy, social engagement, on- and off-campus activities, and nutritious meals for adults beginning at age eighteen. The vision is intentionally intergenerational — children on one side of the campus, adults on the other — a place, McCant says, "where wisdom meets wonder."

## An Intergenerational Model for the East Side

What motivates McCant is simple: meeting community needs close to home.

"This could have been established anywhere in Kansas City," he says. "We are purpose-driven, and we want to provide services where they are needed most. The East Side is near and dear to

my heart."

The impact shows up in jobs as well. Ageless Adventures will employ six to eight staff members, expand opportunities for residents, and help strengthen the workforce pipeline on the East Side. Projects like these don't just meet care needs — they keep dollars circulating locally and build stability for families and nearby businesses.

KD Academy has also helped shift the narrative of Prospect Avenue. McCant laughs when he tells the story: "People hear our address, and there's always a pause. We say, 'See it.' Once they walk through the doors, the old narrative is over. The next question is, 'Do you have a spot?'"

## A Model that Advances CCED's Mission

Taken together, KD Academy and Ageless Adventures reflect exactly the kind of neighborhood-centered

development the CCED Sales Tax Program was created to support. McCant says childcare and elder care help contribute to CCED's focus on economic development in the community by strengthening the community's workforce infrastructure.

When families can rely on safe, consistent care:

- parents stay employed
- adult children caring for elders can remain in the workforce
- new jobs are created within the care sector
- dollars earned in the neighborhood stay in the neighborhood

"Families can go about their day, go to work, and be productive employees," he says.

While McCant's businesses advance CCED's mission, the Sales Tax District's role has been transformative for him.

"Without it, we probably would not be here at this capacity. It has been

the lifeline for developments across the Third District. I am hopeful that when it is time to renew, the city and our community see the same value we did."

"To anyone who pays that sales tax, look at the outcomes," McCant says. "There has been significant economic development as a result. Focus on what has happened for real people."

## What Success Looks Like

KD Academy and Ageless Adventures stand as examples of what public investment can seed when paired with committed local leadership.

However, "success," for McCant, is rooted in gratitude.

"To the founders and to every voter, thank you. Your hard work and dedication created a momentous opportunity for economic development in Kansas City. Without it, we would not be here."

## WORLD AIDS DAY

# Free HIV Testing Gives Black Communities Power

From cost to privacy concerns, barriers have kept many from testing — but free at-home kits give Black communities the power to know and act.

By Voice Health Service

On World AIDS Day – Dec. 1 – health leaders are still underscoring one urgent truth: the only **way to know your HIV status is to get tested**. For Black Americans — who continue to face the highest rates of HIV in the country — testing is both personal and powerful.

According to the CDC, **Black people account for nearly 40% of new HIV diagnoses despite being just 12% of the U.S. population**. Black gay and bisexual men

face some of the highest lifetime risks for HIV, and Black women experience higher infection rates than any other group of women.

Yet many who are living with HIV don't know it. And without knowing, people can unintentionally pass the virus to others.

As we observe World AIDS Day, The Community Voice is highlighting one essential point: **ending HIV in Black communities begins with testing**.

## Why Testing Matters

The CDC recommends everyone ages 13 to 64 get tested for HIV at least once — and more often if you have certain risk factors:

- Having more than one sexual partner
- Being a man who has sex with men
- Having sex with someone who is HIV positive
- Sharing needles or injection equipment
- Having had an STI
- Having sex with partners whose sexual history you don't know

Even if you're in a committed relationship, both partners should know their status. Testing allows people to get lifesaving treatment early, protect their partners, and break the cycle



Testing still remains a major way to help control the spread of HIV and now testing is easier than ever.

of new infections in Black communities.

## Free At-Home Tests: Private, Fast, and Available Through 2027

For people who worry about cost, privacy, stigma, or lack of insurance, at-home

HIV testing has become a game changer.

Through the CDC-funded **Together TakeMeHome** program, anyone 17 or older in the U.S. can order **up to two free at-home HIV tests** every three months — delivered

discreetly to your door.

**Order here: <https://together.takemehome.org/>**

These tests require just a simple oral swab, and you get results in about 20 minutes.

See HIV Page 10 →



## Visit our new Breast Wellness Center

The care teams at Via Christi's Breast Wellness Center in Wichita are ready to help with your unique breast health needs. The new center offers access to personalized care and comprehensive breast health services, including:

- Breast imaging and mammograms\*
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- Lymphedema screenings
- Fitness and nutrition training

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Via Christi**



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Wichita, KS 67214



Call **316-368-5156**  
to schedule an appointment or  
scan the QR code  
to learn more

\*Cancer screening guidelines recommend women get a mammogram every year, beginning at age 40. A doctor's referral is not needed for a screening breast mammogram.

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# Wichita Black Nurses Association Part of Team Mobilizing Health Testing for 29th & Grove Spill

By Bonita Gooch  
Editor-in-Chief

The Wichita Black Nurses Association (WBNA) has been awarded funding to provide free health testing for residents affected by groundwater contamination in Sedgwick County — an effort that builds on the organization's 50-year legacy of trusted, community-centered care.

WBNA is one of six organizations selected to carry out testing through a new \$3.5 million partnership created to ensure residents have access to screenings connected to a decades-old chemical spill near **29th Street and Grove**.

Founded in 1973, the WBNA began with neighborhood blood pressure and glucose checks before expanding into immunizations, health education, and advocacy around disparities in Black and underserved communities.

Their track record of trust



was especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. As misinformation spread and vaccination rates lagged in communities of color, WBNA nurses partnered with the Sedgwick County Health Department and local churches to launch mobile vaccination clinics. By bringing vaccines directly into neighborhoods — and allowing skeptical residents to receive shots and ask questions from nurses who looked like them — the group expanded access for seniors,

working families, and those without transportation.

That long-standing credibility will be critical as testing begins for residents who may have been exposed to groundwater contaminated by a chemical spill believed to have occurred in the 1970s. Many residents learned of the contamination only in 2022, and public health officials recommend screenings for anyone who may have lived or worked in the affected areas.

The statewide response leading



Peggy Jones-Foxx, president, Wichita Black Nurses Association

to this funding effort was sparked by Northeast Millair Neighborhood Association President Aujanae Bennett and state Sen. Oletha Faust-Goudeau, who personally approached Gov. Laura Kelly about the need for a major testing effort.

Kelly immediately agreed to

provide \$1 million in state support, which helped secure a wider coalition of funding partners and ultimately brought total support to \$3.5 million.

Funding contributors include the State of Kansas, Kansas Health Foundation, City of Wichita, Sedgwick County, Wichita Foundation, Fidelity Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas, Stand Together Foundation, and Sunflower Foundation.

Alongside the WBNA, organizations receiving funding for testing include HealthCore, GraceMed, Hunter Health, I Am Wichita, and the Wichita Medical Research and Education Foundation.

For the Wichita Black Nurses Association, the grant continues a 50-year commitment to compassionate care, leadership, and advocacy — and positions them once again as trusted change agents in protecting the health of Northeast Wichita and beyond.

## Holiday Comic Preserves the Legacy of Turner Drug

By Ty Davis  
Voice Contributor

Turner Drug at 9th and Cleveland was once more than a place to pick up a prescription. For many in Wichita's historic McAdams neighborhood, it was an anchor — where names were remembered, trust was earned, and everyone felt welcome. Nearly four decades after its doors closed, retired teacher and local historian Steve Woodman has found a unique way to bring that corner of history back to life: an original graphic comic book titled **"Christmas Eve at Turner's Corner."**

Woodman's journey began in the early 1980s while he was teaching high school history. To make the past feel alive, he interviewed older residents who had run small businesses — soda fountains, corner markets, and drugstores. That's when he met Doc Turner, owner of Turner Drug.

"He stood out above the others with his welcoming tone — 'What can I do for you, young fella?' — and how he displayed real interest in my project," Woodman recalls. "His passion for

his customers and his immediate neighborhood community was impressive."

Years later, Woodman biked past the shuttered storefront and found a heartbreak scene: windows and doors blown out, the interior strewn with debris. Amid the wreckage lay a painted-over advertising thermometer — one of the last tangible remnants of a beloved business.

"I felt deep sadness that after all he had done, this was all that was left behind," he said.

Woodman took the thermometer to his sign-painter friend, Don Ingle, who used a 1958 Wichita phone directory to recreate the Salome Drug Store logo. Woodman displayed the restored piece in his classroom for years — sparking conversations among students who might never have known the story of Turner Drug.

In 2019, a feature on Doc Turner reignited Woodman's passion to share this history more broadly. With encouragement from Ric Wolford at Douglas Photographic Imaging (DPI), he chose an unexpected medium: a graphic comic book, illustrated by one

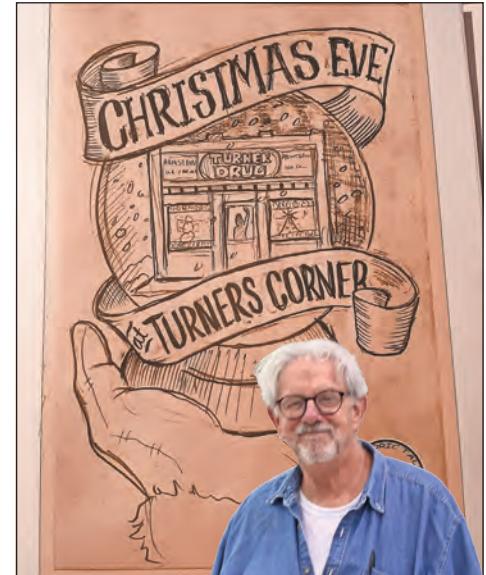
of his former students, professional artist Kyle Dingman.

Set around the holidays, **"Christmas Eve at Turner's Corner"** blends time-travel adventure with real neighborhood touchstones — paying tribute not only to Doc Turner, but also to the Dunbar Theater, the Smart Brothers, and the Phyllis Wheatley Children's Home. Woodman also weaves in personal connections, writing longtime friend Gerald Norwood and Norwood's son David — another former student — into the story.

For Woodman, the project is about more than nostalgia — it's about preserving neighborhood history through creative storytelling. He plans to donate 100% of the proceeds from the book to charitable causes.

**Interested in purchasing the book? They make great Holiday gifts.** Contact Steve Woodman at [stevelwoodman@gmail.com](mailto:stevelwoodman@gmail.com).

Retired teacher and historian Steve Woodman wrote **"Christmas Eve at Turner's Corner"** to preserve the story of Wichita's Turner Drug.



# USD 259 to Shutter Historic Chester Lewis/Mathewson Building

Severe foundation deterioration made the historic building unsafe, prompting USD 259 to close it permanently.

By Bonita Gooch  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

The historic former Mathewson Junior High School building in northeast Wichita — most recently home to Chester I. Lewis Alternative High School — will close permanently at the end of this semester, USD 259 officials announced. The 1950s building has deteriorated to the point that district engineers consider it unsafe.

The facility currently houses three programs, all of which will be relocated:

- **Chester Lewis Alternative High School** will move to the former Cleaveland Elementary School near 31st Street South and West Street. (Cleaveland was closed at the end of the 2023–24 school year.)
- **The Early Childhood Outcomes & Pre-K Team** will move to the Joyce Focht Instructional Support Center on South Main.
- **The Culturally Linguistically Diverse Team** will relocate to Jackson Elementary at 29th and Woodlawn.

Together, these programs included about 60 staff members and roughly 115–130 high school students. The Chester Lewis name will remain in use

and move with the alternative high school program.

#### Structural Damage Prompted Immediate Action

District officials said structural failures previously found at North and East high schools prompted a wider review of aging facilities. When engineers examined the Mathewson building, they discovered extensive foundation deterioration, long-term water and sewage damage, and persistent mold and air-quality issues that could not be reliably mitigated. Renovation would be cost-prohibitive, the district said.

While no demolition date has been set, officials emphasized they do not intend for the shuttered building to sit vacant for years, citing safety, air-quality, and vandalism concerns.

#### Community Concerns Over Loss of History

At a district-sponsored meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church, many residents voiced concern about losing one of the last remaining historic Black educational institutions in Wichita. From the 1960s until its closure in 1969, Mathewson Junior High served as the city's only predominantly Black junior high school and was staffed largely by Black educators.

Attendees also expressed worry about moving the Chester I. Lewis name — honoring a key figure in Wichita's civil rights history — away from the city's historic Black neighborhood. Administrators said they are open to exploring ways for the Lewis name to remain connected to the community.

#### Future of the Site

Closing the Mathewson building had been on the district's radar for years. The narrowly failed \$450 million bond proposal would have demolished the building and replaced it with a new child development center, intended to consolidate services now provided at the Little Early Childhood Center less than half a mile away.

Constructing the center at the site remains an administrative goal, but without bond approval, its future is uncertain. District leaders have discussed bringing another bond issue to voters, though it is unclear whether an early childhood center would be included.

Before the building is shuttered, USD 259 plans to host a public farewell event and tour, allowing former students, staff, and community members to say goodbye and help identify historical items worth preserving.



USD 259 provided photos show support pillar in basement with a large crack

ILLUMINATIONS

November 22, 2025 - January 3, 2026

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## A MAYOR'S FAREWELL

# Tyrone Garner

## Tyrone Garner on Legacy and Lessons

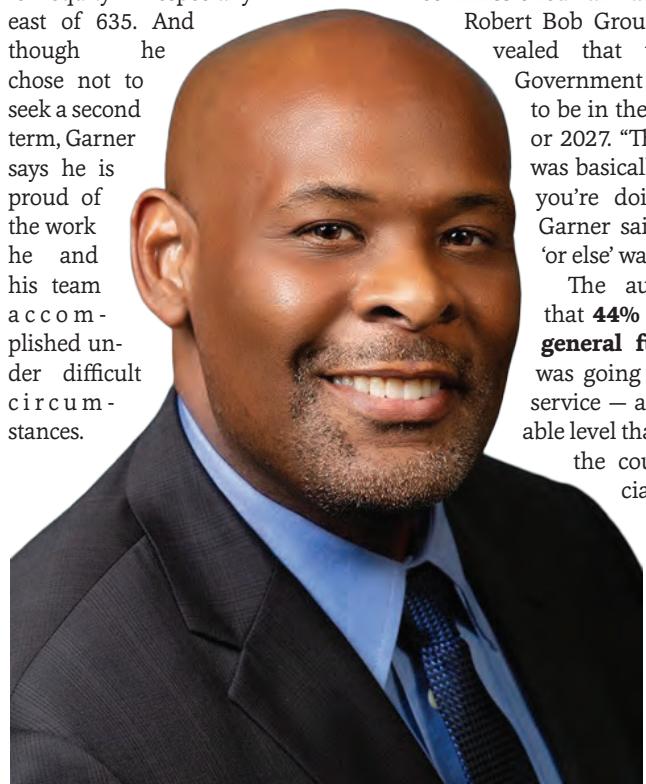
**By Bonita Gooch**  
Voice Editor in Chief

When Tyrone Garner walked into the Unified Government chambers for his final State of the County address, it was clear he was stepping away from office with the same humility he carried into it.

"This has never been about me," he said. "It was always about the potential of what we could achieve collaboratively together."

After nearly **40 years of public service** — from the Kansas City, Kansas Police Department to the mayor's office — Garner is leaving the position the same way he entered it: as a "people's mayor," driven by the voices, needs, and hopes of ordinary residents.

His single four-year term was marked by fiscal crisis, political tension, historic investments, community engagement, and constant calls for equity — especially east of 635. And though he chose not to seek a second term, Garner says he is proud of the work he and his team accomplished under difficult circumstances.



"I'm blessed," he said in our one-on-one interview. "I did my best to try and make a difference in people's lives. My motivations were always pure."

### Called Into Leadership, Not Chasing It

Garner did not plan to become mayor. In fact, he had retired from a decades-long law enforcement career and expected to stay out of public office.

"I didn't wake up one morning and say, 'I want to be mayor,'" he recalled. "Folks asked me to run, and I prayed about it and agreed."

When he entered office in 2021 as the **first Black mayor in KCK's history**, he inherited an organization facing deep internal challenges — many of which were not visible to the public.

Among them was a looming fiscal crisis.

Shortly after taking office, Garner commissioned an audit by the

Robert Bob Group, which revealed that the Unified Government was on track to be in the red by 2026 or 2027. "Their message was basically: stop what you're doing or else," Garner said. "And that 'or else' was serious."

The audit showed that **44% of the city's general fund budget** was going toward debt service — an unsustainable level that threatened the county's financial health.

"I didn't create it. None of us did. We inherited it," he said. "And our priority became protecting

the fiscal stability of this organization."

Through organizational changes, new budgeting protocols, and a new CFO and administrator, the fiscal outlook was improved enough to extend the crisis window from 2026 to 2030-31.

"It gave us breathing room," Garner said. "We're not out of the woods, but we're stable."

### A Mayor Who Centered the People's Voice

For Garner, leadership was never about political power — it was about elevating the voices of residents.

He launched **community input sessions, public forums, Mayor's Tuesdays**, and multiple listening opportunities designed to give residents direct access to decision-makers. His "community-driven agenda," as he called it, became the defining philosophy of his administration.

"You hear so much negative, but there's so much good happening in Wyandotte County," he said. "I felt compelled to highlight the positive."

He even launched the "Dot Proud" awards to honor people, businesses, and community organizations making an impact — leaving 15 awards behind for Mayor-elect Christal Watson to continue.

### Equity East of 635: A Personal Commitment

Garner's most passionate work focused on areas east of 635 that had endured decades of disinvestment, redlining, and neglect.

He pushed for:

- **New parks and recreational spaces**, with nearly 95% of east-side parks revitalized
- **Waived development fees east of 55th Street** to attract investment
- **Supported affordable housing projects**
- **Got lots of parcels out of the City's land bank and into the hands of builders and developers**, projected to yield over

- 450 new housing units
- **Invested in and made further commitments** to much needed Infrastructure commitments, including bridges, sidewalks, and sewers

"We have erased that mentality that the east side isn't worth investing in," Garner said. "The foundation is there for the next administration to build on."

His vision was simple: a Wyandotte County where the difference between east and west is no longer visible.

"I want this to be a community where success and opportunity are everywhere you look," he said.

### Economic Development and \$2 Billion in Investment

Garner's administration saw more than **\$2 billion in economic development projects**, ranging from national brands to local entrepreneurs.

Among them:

- Marvin Windows expansion
- Buc-ees ground breaking with projected local hiring
- KU's Cancer Center expansion
- Margaritaville
- Homefield development
- New uses for the former Cerner building
- Actual downtown development with conversations for more.
- Developers eyeing long-stalled sites like the Brotherhood Building and Indian Springs

He championed a more balanced approach to incentives — pushing back against "corporate welfare," as he called it, asking major developers to "pay their fair share."

"We shouldn't be carrying the load for billion-dollar companies," Garner said. "Not on the backs of working families."

Looking back, Garner said his greatest accomplishment wasn't any single project but the groundwork his administration put in place. "The opportunity is there now because the foundation is there," he said. "Where we couldn't finish, the next administration can build — the policies, financial corrections, and development pathways are ready for them to carry forward."

### The Political Divide That Defined His Term

While Garner achieved tangible wins, much of his tenure was overshadowed by a public rift between his

office and the Unified Government commissioners.

"There were commissioners who wouldn't even meet with me," he said. "I'm a collaborator — that's been the secret of my success — but I could not figure out the politics of the divide."

Meetings publicly fractured. Tensions spilled into commission chambers. And progress slowed.

But something shifted and Garner gives credit to residents who showed up and demanded unity.

"They came out and said, 'Enough. Work together. Get it done.' And we listened," Garner said. "When we started finding common ground, that's when good things began to happen."

In his State of the County address, Garner reflected on that transformation, saying: "Community-driven government has nothing to do with building a legacy, but what good can be left for the next era of leadership."

### The Final Hand-Off: Confidence in Christal Watson

In one of his last public appearances, Garner introduced Mayor-elect Christal Watson with strong praise, saying she was "deeply committed to the values that make our community strong" and would "make all our residents relevant, because that's what she does."

He also issued a clear message to the commissioners:

"Fully and without condition, restore the executive privileges politically withdrawn in 2022... Support her vision. Support her team. Support staff."

During the height of tension, the commissioners voted 9 to 1 to remove the mayor's authority over setting the Unified Government's meeting agenda — historically the mayor's most significant source of influence in what is a largely ceremonial role.

Support her vision. Support her team. Support staff."

In our interview with the Mayor, Garner expressed optimism for Watson's ability to achieve what politics prevented him from completing.

"I think she's going to be able to get even more done than I could," he said. "The foundation is solid. Now they just need to build on it."

See **GARNER** Page 10 →

# A MAYOR'S BEGINNING

# Christal Watson

## Christal Watson's Vision for KCK

By Bonita Gooch  
Voice Editor-in-Chief

When Christal Watson walked onto the stage after Mayor Tyrone Garner introduced her as Kansas City, Kansas' next mayor, the room rose to its feet long before she spoke a word. Garner called her victory "phenomenal and historic," praising her for running a race "unlike anything we've ever seen before."

Wyandotte County has elected its **first Black woman mayor**, and she won with **57% of the vote**, the widest margin in more than a decade of tightly contested mayoral races. Her opponent carried the powerful endorsements — the unions, political organizations, and the usual influencers in KCK politics. She had none of them.

But Watson had the people. "It was truly the power of the people," she said in our one-on-one interview. "I didn't have the endorsements. I didn't have the unions. But the people felt what I was saying — because I'm one of them."

At **61**, Watson steps into office on Dec. 15 with a mandate rooted not in political machinery but in trust, authenticity, and lived experience. And she steps in at a time when residents are hungry for unity, stability, and focus after years of political tension inside the Unified Government.

### A Wyandotte County Daughter With Deep, Lasting Roots

Watson was raised in Wyandotte County in a close-knit family steeped in community, culture, and church life. Her father was a well-known local broadcaster who filled the house with jazz—Nancy

Wilson, Lou Rawls, Sergio Mendes. Her mother was deeply involved at Eighth Street Baptist Church, where Watson's grandfather served as minister of music.

She attended **Wyandotte High School**, where she was active in drama, forensics, and debate — early hints of a communicator who could connect across backgrounds. College came in stages as she balanced raising four sons and building a career. She eventually completed both her bachelor's and master's degrees in organizational management, a field that would later prove central to her leadership style.

Her family remains her anchor — her husband of nearly 40 years, their four sons (all former college athletes), and now grandchildren. She joked lovingly about the household energy of a sports family but made clear they were her source of strength throughout the campaign.

### A Career Spanning Corporate Leadership, Community Work, and Public Service

Watson's professional path didn't begin in politics. She spent **17 years at Sprint**, learning systems, communication, and organizational structure — skills that would later translate directly into how she manages teams and processes.

- After Sprint, she transitioned to roles focused on community impact:
- United Way of Wyandotte County
- The first Community Foundation Specialist at Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools
- Director of Volunteer and Guest Services, Volunteer

Advocates, and Patient Services at Truman Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri

Working in health care taught her patience, empathy, and how to manage conflict.

"If I can work with volunteers between 70 and 100 (years old), I can work with anybody," she laughed.

Her role at Truman also expanded her regional relationships — connections in Kansas City, Missouri that she believes will help strengthen cross-river cooperation. For years, KCK leaders have struggled to collaborate meaningfully with KCMO, but Watson has already worked professionally with leaders on that side of the state line.

Her political leadership began in education — serving on the KCK Board of Education beginning in 2011. She later became President & CEO of the Black Chamber of Commerce, a role that broadened her reach and deepened her engagement with small businesses, entrepreneurs, and economic development.

But perhaps most critically, she served as **Deputy Chief for Neighborhood and Small Business Development** under former Mayor David Alvey.

"By that time, I understood the system 100 percent," she said. "How the mayor works, how commissioners work, how staff works."

That insider knowledge gives Watson an advantage: she won't need months to learn how the Unified Government functions.

### A Victory Built on Trust, Not Endorsements

Despite having zero endorsements in a race against

Wyandotte's political machinery, the voters responded to Watson's sincerity, her record of community work, and her message of unity.

Mayor Garner — who introduced her during his final address — told the audience he was confident she would "make all our residents relevant" because "everybody matters to her."

He also called on commissioners to restore full executive authority to the mayor's office so that Watson could lead effectively, saying, "Mayor-elect Watson earned the right, and she should not be denied."

During his first year in office, commissioners voted to remove the mayor's authority over setting the Unified Government's meeting agenda — historically the mayor's most significant source of influence in a largely ceremonial role.

### Her Leadership Vision: Reset, Renew, Rebuild

Watson's first major message as incoming mayor centered on three words:

#### Reset. Renew. Rebuild.

**Reset**, she said, means clearing away old barriers and "embracing a fresh mindset," where collaboration replaces conflict. "Leadership is not about who gets credit," she told the audience. "It's about who gets results."

**Renewal** is about committing to transparency, fairness, and community care. It means asking, What kind of county do we want to be?

**Rebuilding**, she said, is where hope becomes action: "We will rebuild trust between government and the community. We will rebuild processes that help, not hinder, progress. And we will rebuild the infrastructure that supports our families, our businesses, and our future workforce."

Her message was expansive and inclusive: every neighborhood, every commissioner, every staff member, every resident would have a voice.

### A Different Kind of Mayor — One Focused on Collaboration

The last four years in Wyandotte County were often marked by political tension between the mayor's office and commissioners — a dynamic even Garner acknowledged in his farewell interview. "I had commissioners that wouldn't even meet with me," he told

you. "I'm a collaborator... but politics got in the way."

Watson is already signaling a different approach. She has quietly begun meeting with every commissioner, reaching out to staff, and building her mayor's office team around strategy, communication, and community relationships.

She was emphatic in her speech: "I can't wait to work with the commissioners... We've got so much work to do, but I'm so optimistic our better days are ahead."

Unlike some of the UG's former mayors, Watson says she plans to lead by "listening first and serving first."

### Looking Ahead

Watson takes office with broad community backing and a clear message: Wyandotte County's best days are ahead if its leaders are willing to move forward together.

"I'm ready to work," she said, closing her speech. "Are you ready, Wyandotte County? Then let's get it done."

### Why She's Ready

Watson points to three elements that make her prepared for this moment:

#### 1. Organizational Leadership Training

Her graduate degree in management and leadership, paired with years overseeing complex teams, shaped her collaborative style.

#### 2. Knowledge of the Unified Government

Her experience as deputy chief gave her direct insight into how decisions actually move — or stall — inside the UG.

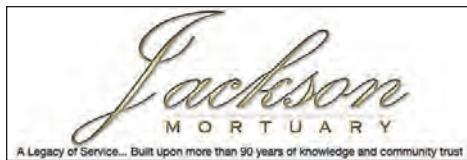
#### 3. Relationships Across the Metro

Her work in KCK and KCMO positions her to rebuild cross-border cooperation — something KCK hasn't strongly leveraged in years.

She believes her readiness is not just professional but spiritual.

"This is bigger than me," she said. "I believe the Lord was preparing me."





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01.74.02 – Final Cleaning  
02.41.00 – Selective Demolition  
03.00.00 – Building Concrete  
04.20.00 – Masonry  
07.84.00 – Firestopping  
08.10.00 – Doors, Frames, & Hardware  
08.33.00 – Overhead Coiling Doors  
09.50.00 – Acoustical Ceilings & Drywall  
09.65.00 – Resilient Flooring & Carpet  
09.67.00 – Resinous Flooring  
09.90.00 – Painting  
10.14.00 – Signage  
11.40.00 – Food Service Equipment  
12.20.00 – Roller Window Shades  
12.30.01 – Carpentry, Casework, & Specialties  
22.00.00 – Plumbing  
26.00.00 – Electrical

**Bids will be received by JE Dunn via [BuildingConnected.com](http://BuildingConnected.com) until  
December 11, 2025 at 2:00 PM.**

JE Dunn invites 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 Ethan Wegner, Project Manager, by phone at (816) 809-9486, or by email at [ethan.wegner@jedunn.com](mailto:ethan.wegner@jedunn.com).

EOE, Minority/Female/Disability/Veteran/Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity



**Larry James McCartney, 75**  
April 10, 1950 - Nov. 30, 2025  
Service will be held at 10 a.m. Dec. 12 at Tabernacle Bible Church, 1817 N. Volutsia.

**Jennie Shellman, 94**  
May 5, 1931 - Nov. 29, 2025  
Service will be held at 1 p.m. Dec. 11 at Iasis Christian Center, 1914 E. 11th St N.

**Jim H. Harrison, 85**  
June 18, 1940 - November 28, 2025  
Service will be held at 10 am on Dec. 13 at Grant Chapel AME, 2750 N Hillside

**Rosa Nulan, 93**  
Feb. 27, 1932 - Nov. 26, 2025  
Service will be held at 11 a.m. Dec. 9 at Mark United Methodist Church, 525 N. Lorraine.

**Kevin James Porter, 61**  
Aug. 2, 1964 - Nov. 24, 2025  
Service will be held at 2 p.m. Dec. 13 at Madison Ave. Church of Christ, 1740 N. Madison Ave.

**Tyler Wright, 27**  
June 6, 1998 - Nov. 22, 2025  
Service was held Dec. 6 at New Jerusalem Baptist Church.

**Delois Jordan, 81**  
July 7, 1944 - Nov. 21, 2025  
Service was held Dec. 2 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

**Jerry Pridgett, 68**  
Oct. 27, 1957 - Nov. 18, 2025  
Service was held Nov. 25 at New Beginning Seventh Day Adventist.

**Antonio "Tony" Riley, 56**  
April 6, 1969 - Nov. 18, 2025  
Graveside service was held Dec. 4 at Old Mission Cemetery.

**Bennie Jewell McCraw, 82**  
March 11, 1943 - Nov. 17, 2025  
Service will be held at 11 a.m. Dec. 11 at Holy Savior Catholic Church, 3000 E. 13th St.

**Lutisha Hill, 66**  
Sept. 22, 1959 - Nov. 14, 2025  
Service was held Dec. 2 at St. Mark United Methodist Church.

**KIVA, from Page 4**

### Microloans, Not Miracles – But a Meaningful Start

Kiva KC's microloans are intentionally small, practical and designed for beginners. They help people test ideas, stabilize side hustles, launch neighborhood businesses or take the next step in a growing venture.

EDCKC capital access manager Regina Sosa says many founders initially don't believe the model is real.

"People ask, 'Zero percent interest? Where's the catch?'" Sosa said. "A lot of my work is helping them understand that Kiva really is built differently."

Kansas City's Kiva hub is still early in its growth, building awareness and strengthening partnerships across neighborhood organizations, chambers and business-support groups. But the early signs — and stories like that of Antwan Daniels — show the promise of the model.

For many local entrepreneurs, Kiva isn't a charity and it isn't a handout. It's simply a fair shot — one \$25 contribution at a time.

**HIV, from Page 5**

The program has already mailed out more than 440,000 tests, including to tens of thousands of people who had never been tested before.

If you're under 17, local clinics and community health centers may offer free or low-cost tests.

### When Should You Test? Understanding the Window Period

If you believe you've been exposed to HIV, it's important to know that no test can detect the virus immediately. Your body needs time to develop detectable antibodies or enough virus for tests to find it — a delay known as the **HIV window period**.

General guidelines:

- If you know the date of possible exposure, test again at three months, when results are about 99% accurate.
- If you develop early flu-like symptoms, see

a doctor right away. A blood test can detect HIV as early as 10 to 33 days after exposure.

- While waiting to retest, avoid unprotected sex and do not share needles.

### If You Test Positive

A positive self-test must be confirmed with a blood test. But treatment today is highly effective:

- Most people take one pill a day.
- Treatment can reduce the virus to "undetectable," meaning you cannot transmit HIV sexually.

People diagnosed early and treated consistently live long, healthy lives.

### If You Test Negative

- Continue protecting yourself.
- Consider taking PrEP, a medication that significantly lowers your risk of getting HIV.
- Use condoms.
- Get tested regularly if your risk changes.

**GARNER, from Page 8**

### A Legacy Rooted in Love for Wyandotte County

As he leaves office, Garner says he carries no bitterness — only gratitude.

"I hope people remember that my motivations were pure," he said. "I love

Wyandotte County. I did my best. I cared. And if I made a difference in even a few people's lives, then it was worth it."

He sees himself not as a politician, but a lifelong public servant.

"I'm not here because I had to be. I'm here because I

cared," he said. "I wanted this community to be blessed."

In the end, Garner believes his term helped uncover opportunity — not just problems.

"If I didn't do anything else, I brought forward the potential," he said. "Now let's build on it."

## NEXT STEPS

# College Careers Credentials



A special supplement to  
**THE VOICE**

# How to Find the Right Career Path for You

By Voice News Service

**C**hoosing a career path has never been more complicated—or more flexible. Whether you're a high school senior, a working adult thinking about a change, or someone returning to school after years away, today's job market offers more options than ever. But with so many choices, many people feel stuck before they even begin.

The good news: You don't need to have everything figured out at once. Career planning is a process, and it starts with understanding your strengths, interests, and the kind of life you want to build. Here are practical steps to help you find the right direction.

### Start with Your Strengths

The first step in choosing a career is identifying what you naturally do well. Are you good with your hands? Do you enjoy solving problems? Are you patient, creative, or detail-oriented?

"People often underestimate skills they've used for years," says a career advisor at a Kansas technical college. "Those skills can point directly to a career you'll thrive in."

Free career assessment tools—available through Kansas Workforce Centers and online platforms—can help you identify strengths you may not recognize in yourself.

### Think About What You Enjoy Doing Daily

Skills matter, but so does enjoying the work itself. Think about what energizes you:

- Working outdoors or in active environments
- Helping people or caring for others
- Fixing things, taking things apart, or figuring out how something works
- Creating, designing, or organizing
- Working with technology or machines

Your everyday interests often translate into career pathways. If you enjoy fixing things, the skilled trades might be a fit. If you love helping people, consider healthcare. If you have a creative streak, cosmetology,

digital media, or culinary arts could align with your strengths.

Visiting a campus or talking to current students can help you see what different careers look like in real life.

### Consider Lifestyle and Long-Term Goals

Career choice isn't just about money—it's also about the lifestyle that comes with it.

Ask yourself:

- Do you want a job that's hands-on or desk-based?
- Do you prefer consistent daytime hours or flexible schedules?
- How much income do you need to support your goals?
- What physical demands are you comfortable with?

In Kansas and Missouri, high-demand fields include healthcare, construction trades, manufacturing, information technology, transportation, and aviation-related careers. These fields offer stability, growth, and opportunities to advance over time.

### Explore Education Paths That Match Your Needs

A four-year degree works for some people, but it's far from the only route to a meaningful career. Today's job market values skills, and many high-paying roles only require a certificate, license, or 18–24 months of training.

Here are a few options:

- **Certificates** (weeks to months): welding, CNA, medical billing, CDL.
- **Licenses**: LPN, nursing, cosmetology, HVAC tech.
- **Associate degrees**: dental hygiene, aviation tech, IT, industrial maintenance.

- **Apprenticeships**: electrician, pipefitter, lineman—"earn while you learn" models.

Technical schools often offer short programs that let students test an industry before committing to a longer path.

### Try Something Small Before Making a Big Decision

If you're unsure, start small:

- Take a single introductory class
- Visit a college's open house
- Meet with a career advisor (often free)
- Explore hands-on workshops or job shadows
- Talk to someone working in a career you're curious about

Small steps often spark clarity—and they're far easier than trying to choose a lifelong career all at once.

### Where to Get Help

Kansas Workforce Centers and Missouri Job Centers offer free career planning, assessment tools, résumé support, and information about training funds. Many technical colleges provide one-on-one advising to help potential students explore programs without pressure.

### Bottom Line

Finding the right career isn't about guessing the perfect path—it's about taking one informed step at a time. When you understand your strengths, explore your interests, and choose an education pathway that fits your goals, the next step becomes clearer. And in today's job market, there's no shortage of opportunities for people ready to build a career with purpose.



# Fast-Track Careers: Jobs You Can Start in Under Two Years

## Education That Works. Skills That Pay.

By Voices News Service

For many people, the idea of spending four years in college — or racking up thousands in student loans — feels out of reach. The good news? A growing number of **high-demand, high-paying jobs** can be launched in **two years or less**, thanks to technical schools, apprenticeships, and certification programs that lead directly to the workforce.

Whether you're starting fresh, changing careers, or looking to level up your income fast, these "**fast-track careers**" offer opportunity without the long wait.

### A Changing Workforce

Across the U.S., employers are struggling to fill skilled positions. Baby boomer retirements, expanding infrastructure projects, and the surge in digital technology have opened the door for workers with **specialized technical training** — not necessarily college degrees.

In Kansas and Missouri, state workforce programs are actively promoting **career and technical education (CTE)** pathways that connect students to jobs within months of graduation. Many programs are offered through community colleges or trade schools and cost a fraction of a four-year degree.

Here's a look at six careers you can start in less than two years — and sometimes much sooner.

### 1. Welding: Fusing Metal and Opportunity

**Training time:** 6–18 months

**Median salary:** Around \$48,000 per year (experienced welders can earn much more)

Welders are in demand across construction, manufacturing, transportation, and energy. With federal infrastructure projects underway nationwide, skilled welders are commanding top pay — especially those trained in **pipe welding, underwater welding, or robotics**.

Training programs, available at schools such as Wichita State Tech and Kansas City Kansas Community College, teach students the techniques to read blueprints, handle

various metals, and pass industry certification tests. Many welders start earning within a year of enrolling.

### 2. HVAC Technician: Keeping America Comfortable

**Training time:** 9 months–2 years  
**Median salary:** \$54,000 per year, with top earners exceeding \$80,000

As climate extremes grow and homes become more energy-efficient, demand for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) technicians continues to climb.

Most HVAC programs combine classroom instruction with hands-on labs and apprenticeships. Graduates can become licensed technicians specializing in installation, repair, or energy management. Some even open their own businesses after a few years of experience.

Kansas' **Excel in CTE program** allows high school students to earn free college credits toward HVAC certifications — a valuable head start.

### 3. Cybersecurity Specialist: Guarding the Digital Frontier

**Training time:** 12–24 months  
**Median salary:** \$78,000 per year (entry-level positions often start near \$55,000)

Every industry — from banking to healthcare — faces growing threats from cyberattacks. Cybersecurity professionals protect sensitive data, monitor systems, and respond to breaches.

Two-year associate degrees or certification programs (like **CompTIA Security+** or **Certified Ethical Hacker**) can lead to immediate employment. Many community colleges partner with universities and employers to create **stackable credentials**, allowing students to start working while continuing toward higher certifications or degrees.

In Kansas City, for instance, **Metropolitan Community College's Cybersecurity Center** offers direct job connections to local employers through apprenticeship programs.

### 4. Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA): The Front Line of Care

**Training time:**

4–12 weeks

**Median salary:** \$36,000 per



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**year**, with benefits and advancement options

Healthcare careers continue to grow, and **CNAs are in especially high demand** as the population ages. CNAs assist patients with daily living activities, monitor vital signs, and provide emotional support in hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities.

Many enter the field quickly through short-term training — some programs take as little as one month — and later continue toward **Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)** or **Registered Nurse (RN)** credentials.

Local hospitals, nursing homes, and workforce centers often partner with programs that cover training costs in exchange for a job commitment after certification.

### 5. Truck Driving: Delivering America's Goods

**Training time:** 3–8 weeks (for Commercial Driver's License, or CDL)

**Median salary:** \$50,000–\$70,000 per year, with potential for six figures in specialized hauling

The country's supply chain depends on skilled drivers. With a national shortage of more than 80,000 truckers, CDL-certified drivers are almost guaranteed employment after graduation.

Kansas and Missouri are major transportation hubs, meaning **regional and long-haul opportunities abound**. Some carriers even offer paid training and sign-on bonuses for

new drivers.

Truck driving offers flexibility and independence — perfect for people who prefer the open road to an office cubicle.

### 6. IT Support Specialist: Solving Tech Troubles

**Training time:**

6–18 months

**Median salary:** \$60,000 per year

Behind every working computer network is a skilled IT professional keeping systems running smoothly. IT support specialists install hardware, troubleshoot software, and help organizations adapt to new technologies.

Entry-level positions often require only a certificate or associate degree, and programs like the **Google IT Support Professional Certificate** (available online) can prepare students for industry-recognized credentials in less than a year.

From small businesses to hospitals and schools, IT support specialists are vital — and many move into cybersecurity or systems administration with additional training.

### Short Training, Long-Term Payoff

Beyond quick entry into the workforce, short-term career programs come with **lower tuition and less debt**. Many trade and community colleges offer tuition assistance through:

- The **FAFSA**, which provides access to Pell Grants (often

covering the full cost of certification programs)

- State workforce grants, such as the **Kansas Promise Scholarship**, which pays tuition for high-demand fields
- Employer reimbursement programs or apprenticeships. Graduates can also build on their credentials over time — stacking certifications or pursuing associate and bachelor's degrees while working.

### A Path for Every Type of Learner

Not everyone learns best in a lecture hall. Career and technical education (CTE) programs emphasize **hands-on learning**, smaller class sizes, and direct mentorship. Students graduate with both a credential and practical experience.

For many adults, fast-track programs are a second chance to reinvent themselves. From veterans transitioning to civilian life to parents re-entering the workforce, these programs provide flexible schedules and strong job placement support.

"Students see immediate results," says an advisor at Wichita State Tech. "They're not waiting four years to find out if their degree will translate into a job — they're earning and advancing within months."

### Getting Started

If you're ready to explore a

See **CAREERS** Page 13 →

# Free Local Help for Your Next Career Move

By Voice News Service

In today's job market, the path to a stable, well-paying career often begins with good information and the right support. Across Kansas and Missouri, you'll find a network of Workforce Centers, Job Centers, community colleges, technical schools, and apprenticeship programs that exist to help people build skills and access training.

These organizations offer everything from career assessments and advising to job-training grants and employer partnerships, making them a valuable resource for

anyone exploring college, career, or credential-based programs.

## 1. Kansas Workforce Centers

Provide:

- Free career assessments
- Job search support
- Training vouchers (WIOA)
- Career coaching
- Apprenticeship connections

## 2. Missouri Job Centers

*Missouri's direct equivalent to Kansas Workforce Centers Provide:*

- Career assessments
- Resume/interview support
- WIOA-funded training

assistance

- Skill-building workshops
- Employer hiring fairs
- Apprenticeship referrals

## 3. Community Colleges & Technical Colleges in Both States

Most offer:

- Free career counseling
- Program exploration sessions
- Enrollment advisors
- Prior-learning assessments for adults
- Guided career pathway planning

(Examples you can reference if

needed: Metropolitan Community College (KC), Kansas City Kansas Community College, State Tech, Wichita State Tech, etc.)

## 4. Regional Workforce Development Boards

These boards coordinate local job-training grants, employer partnerships, and apprenticeship programs.

Examples include:

- Workforce Partnership (Johnson, Wyandotte, Leavenworth Counties – KS)
- Full Employment Council (Jackson, Clay, Platte, Cass,

Ray Counties – MO)\*\*

- Southeast KANSASWorks
- Kansas WorkforceONE
- Central Kansas Workforce

## 5. Apprenticeship & Industry Training Providers

Both states have strong apprenticeship systems through:

- IBEW (electricians)
- UA Pipefitters/Plumbers
- Carpenters & Joiners Union
- Sheet Metal Workers
- Manufacturing apprenticeship hubs
- Healthcare apprenticeships (growing in KC area)

## CAREERS, from Page 12 ↓

fast-track career, here are a few steps to begin:

**1. Identify your interests and strengths.** Hands-on? Consider trades like HVAC or welding. Tech-savvy? Look into IT or cybersecurity.

Compassionate? Healthcare might be your path.

**2. Research accredited programs near you.** Visit your local community or technical college website for details on course length, costs, and job placement rates.

**3. Apply for financial aid**

**early.** Complete the FAFSA at [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov) starting October 1, 2025, for 2026–27 aid.

**4. Ask about apprenticeships or employer partnerships.** Many companies sponsor training and guarantee employment upon completion.

**5. Start small – and build.**

Even a short certificate can lead to long-term career growth once you're in the field.

## The Bottom Line

Today's job market rewards skill, not just degrees. Whether you're interested in technology, healthcare, or the

trades, **fast-track careers offer a faster, more affordable route to stability and success.**

In less than two years – sometimes less than six months – you could be on your way to a steady paycheck, valuable experience, and a future filled with opportunity.

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# Build Your Career

## ONE CREDENTIAL AT A TIME

By Voice News Service

Today, more people are turning to **stackable credentials** — short, career-focused training programs that build on one another — to enter the workforce quickly and keep advancing over time. Instead of committing to a long degree program all at once, students can earn a certificate, start working, and return later to add new skills without starting over.

This step-by-step approach is ideal for working adults, career changers, and anyone who wants a faster, more affordable path into high-demand fields. Here's how stackable credentials work across major industries in our region.

### Healthcare Pathway:

**CNA → LPN → RN**

One of the clearest examples comes from healthcare:

**Start:** Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) for fast entry into the workforce.

**Next:** Earn a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) license for higher pay and responsibility.

**Later:** Build to Registered Nurse (RN) through an associate or bachelor's program.

Each credential raises earning potential and opens new job options.

### IT & Cybersecurity:

**Help Desk → Network Tech → Cybersecurity Specialist**

Technology careers are built for stacking skills:

**Start:** A short IT Support or

Help Desk certificate.

**Next:** Add networking credentials such as CompTIA Network+ or Cisco CCNA.

**Later:** Advance into cybersecurity with specialized certifications.

This pathway can take someone from an entry-level IT job into an \$80K+ cybersecurity career.

### Skilled Trades:

**Welding → Industrial**

### Maintenance → Supervisor

Many technical trades follow a natural stacking structure:

**Start:** A welding certificate to begin working immediately.

**Next:** Add industrial maintenance or mechatronics training to move into higher-paying roles.

**Later:** Become a journeyman with significantly higher wages.

**Future:** Add leadership or safety credentials to move into management.

Each step builds on the last, with clear wage increases.

### Transportation:

**CDL → Specialized Certifications → Fleet Management**

Transportation careers offer quick entry and room to grow:

**Start:** Earn a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) in a matter of weeks.

**Next:** Add endorsements such as tanker, hazmat, or doubles/triples.

**Later:** Move into dispatch,

logistics, or fleet management.

Stacking credentials leads to greater responsibility and higher pay.

### Early Childhood Education:

**Assistant → CDA →**

### Associate Degree

Education pathways also stack naturally:

**Start:** Childcare assistant certificate.

**Next:** Earn the Child Development Associate (CDA), recognized nationwide.

**Later:** Complete an associate degree for leadership or teaching assistant roles.

This allows educators to grow their skills while working.

### A Smarter Path for Today's Workforce

Stackable credentials give students and workers the flexibility to build a career over time, adding skills when they're ready and earning income along the way. Technical colleges, community colleges, and apprenticeship programs across Kansas and Missouri have expanded options that make this step-by-step approach easier than ever.

If you'd like this further reduced, formatted for print, or turned into a sidebar or explainer graphic, just let me know.



### How to Know If a Program Is Worth It

With so many training options available, it's important to choose quality programs. Here's what to look for:

#### Accreditation or Licensing Approval

Make sure the program meets state or national standards.

#### Job Placement Rates

Ask how many graduates find work in their field—and how quickly.

#### Employer Partnerships

Programs backed by local industries often lead to better opportunities.

#### Hands-On Training

The more real-world practice a program offers, the more confident employers will be when hiring.

#### Costs and Financial Aid

Many short-term programs qualify for grants, workforce funding, or employer tuition support.

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# FAFSA 101: The Most Important Step to Paying for College or Career Training

By Voice News Service

Each year, millions of students miss out on thousands of dollars in free money for college, trade school, or career training — all because they don't fill out one form: the FAFSA.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid unlocks access to grants, scholarships, work-study jobs, and low-interest federal loans. It is the single most important tool for making education affordable, yet also one of the most misunderstood. Whether you're planning for a four-year university, community college, technical program, or apprenticeship track, completing the FAFSA can dramatically reduce the cost of your education.

Here's what every student — and parent — needs to know for the 2026–27 academic year.

## Why the FAFSA Matters

Filling out the FAFSA does far more than determine eligibility for federal student loans. It's how colleges, state agencies, and private organizations decide who gets free or reduced-cost financial aid. Completing the form helps determine eligibility for:

- **Federal Pell Grants** (money you never repay)
- **State grants and scholarships**
- **Work-study jobs** on campus
- **Institutional aid** directly from colleges
- **Low-interest federal student loans**

Even families who believe they "won't qualify" should file. There is **no income cutoff**, and many households — including middle-income and higher-income families — receive aid due to factors such as having more than one child in college or facing special financial circumstances.

## When to Apply

For the **2026–27 school year**, the FAFSA opens **October 1, 2025**, and the federal filing deadline is **June 30, 2027**. But waiting that long is a mistake. **Many grants are first-come, first-served**, and states often run out of funds early.



For students in our region:

• **Kansas:** Priority deadline is typically **April 1, 2026**, but many colleges encourage filing **by March 1**.

• **Missouri:** State aid deadline is usually **February 1, 2026**, and officials recommend submitting as soon as possible **after October 1**.

Most community colleges, universities, and technical programs also have their own scholarship deadlines. Check each school's financial aid page early and mark the dates.

## How to Complete the FAFSA: Step-by-Step

The process is easier than many people expect, especially with the simplified form. Here's how to prepare:

### 1. Create an FSA ID.

Both the student and at least one parent (for dependent students) need an FSA ID at studentaid.gov. This login allows you to fill out and electronically sign the form.

### 2. Gather your documents.

You'll need:

- Social Security or Alien Registration number

- 2024 federal tax returns and W-2s
- Bank and investment records
- A list of schools you're considering

### 3. Start the FAFSA.

Visit fafsa.gov or use the myStudentAid mobile app. The application takes about 30–45 minutes, and you can save and return anytime.

### 4. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool.

This tool safely imports your tax information, reducing errors and speeding up processing.

### 5. Submit early and check your Student Aid Report (SAR).

Your SAR summarizes your application. Review it carefully and correct mistakes quickly.

### 6. Compare financial aid offers.

Each college that accepts you will send a financial aid award letter. Compare net costs — not just the amount of aid — before choosing a school.

## Myths That Cost Students Money

### Myth 1: "My family makes too much to qualify."

**Truth:** There is no income cutoff. Many families who assume they won't receive aid do.

### Myth 2: "FAFSA is only for four-year colleges."

**Truth:** FAFSA applies to community colleges, technical programs, apprenticeships, and certification programs.

### Myth 3: "The form is too complicated."

**Truth:** The redesigned FAFSA has fewer questions, clearer instructions, and built-in help tools. Many schools also hold free FAFSA Nights.

### Myth 4: "I need to wait until I'm accepted."

**Truth:** You can list up to 20 schools even before applying. Each will use FAFSA data to calculate aid.

### Myth 5: "My parents' citizenship matters."

**Truth:** It does not. Students who are U.S. citizens or eligible noncitizens may apply regardless of their parents' status.

### Myth 6: "FAFSA loans are bad debt."

**Truth:** Federal loans usually have **lower interest rates** and **lenient repayment options**, especially compared to private loans.

## Common FAFSA Mistakes to Avoid

- Missing priority deadlines
- Using the wrong website — the only official site is **fafsa.gov**
- Not using your legal name from your Social Security card
- Forgetting signatures from both student and parent
- Leaving fields blank instead of entering "0"
- Ignoring emails requesting verification documents

Small errors can delay your aid — or cost you money entirely.

## Where to Get Local Help in Kansas & Missouri

You don't have to fill out the FAFSA alone. Many organizations in our region offer **free, one-on-one assistance**, especially for first-generation or low-income families.

## Kansas Resources

• **Kansas Board of Regents:** FAFSA events and workshops. [kansasregents.org](http://kansasregents.org)

• **GEAR UP Kansas and TRIO** programs in Wichita, Kansas City, and Topeka.

• **Community colleges and technical schools** such as WSU Tech, Hutchinson Community College, and KCKCC host FAFSA Nights each fall.

## Missouri Resources

• **Missouri FAFSA Frenzy** events statewide: [dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/fafsa/frenzy.php](http://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/fafsa/frenzy.php)

• **Kansas City Scholars** and the **Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis** offer FAFSA mentoring.

## Online Tools

• **studentaid.gov** – FAFSA portal with tutorials

• **BigFuture (College Board)** – estimates aid and compares schools

## The Bottom Line

FAFSA isn't just a form — it's opportunity. Completing it early, avoiding common mistakes, and using local support can make college, technical training, or certification programs far more affordable. When October 1 arrives, don't wait. Filing early can be the difference between getting aid and missing out.

## Key FAFSA Dates & Resources

**FAFSA Opens:**  
October 1, 2025

**Federal Deadline:**  
June 30, 2027

**Kansas Priority Date:**  
April 1, 2026

**Missouri Priority Date:**  
February 1, 2026

**Where to Apply:**  
[fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov)



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