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A trusted voice from the community's perspective

BOLEY RISING

HISTORIC RODEO WEEKEND
DRAWS CROWDS, CULTURE,
PRIDE, AND NEW INVESTMENT.

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Under Kansas' New Charlie Kirk Law, Actions Like These Are Protected

K-State backlash over racist sign highlights how Kansas' new campus speech law limits universities' ability to intervene in offensive public demonstrations.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

Under Kansas' newly passed KIRK Act — named after conservative activist Charlie Kirk — controversial and offensive demonstrations like the one recently seen at Kansas State University are now far more difficult for public universities to stop or remove, even when students and community leaders view them as racist or emotionally harmful.

The controversy erupted after an individual sat on a bench in Bosco Student Plaza holding a sign that read "Say N---- Win Candy," according to photos and videos shared online. The display immediately sparked outrage across campus and on social media.

Originally, some witnesses reported that the individual appeared to be a white person in blackface. Later descriptions escalated to claims of "full-body blackface." But as more images circulated, others questioned those assumptions. Based on visible features, including the person's skin tone and ashy knees, many now believe the individual may actually have been Black.

Still, many people said the person's race did not change the offensiveness of the display itself.

The outrage centered on the public use of one of the most painful racial slurs in American history and the



An individual sits in Bosco Student Plaza at Kansas State University with a sign that sparked outrage across campus and online. The incident is now being viewed as an early public test of Kansas' newly passed KIRK Act, which expands free speech protections in outdoor public areas at state universities.

willingness to publicly encourage others to say it on the campus of a public university.

The local NAACP responded quickly, initially demanding the university remove the individual and investigate the incident. The organization later clarified that it could not confirm the person's race or whether the individual was actually a student.

But critics who demanded immediate action may not have fully understood how dramatically Kansas law changed during the 2026 legislative session.

Earlier this year, Republicans in the Kansas Legislature passed House Bill 2333 — formally called the Kansas Intellectual Rights and Knowledge Act, or KIRK Act.

Democratic Gov. Laura

Kelly vetoed the bill, warning it could create confusion for schools and courts. Republicans later overrode her veto and enacted the measure into law.

Supporters described the law as necessary to protect free speech rights on college campuses and prevent universities from silencing viewpoints based on politics or ideology.

The law was named after Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, a nationally known conservative student organization.

Kirk became famous for aggressive conservative campus activism and claims that universities suppress conservative viewpoints. But he was also one of the country's most controversial political figures. Critics accused him

of using rhetoric viewed as racist, anti-Black, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, and inflammatory toward minority communities.

The KIRK Act significantly expanded free speech protections at Kansas public colleges and universities.

The law declares outdoor areas on public campuses — including sidewalks, plazas, lawns, and gathering areas — to be public forums. That means speech in those areas receives broad constitutional protection, even when the speech is offensive, racist, vulgar, hateful, or deeply unpopular.

Under the law, universities generally cannot remove or punish people in those public spaces simply because others disagree with what is being said or find it offensive. The law also allows individuals to sue schools if they believe their free speech rights were violated.

That appears to be the legal position Kansas State University relied upon in responding to the Bosco Plaza incident.

In a statement, university officials said K-State expects members of its community to engage respectfully and foster a culture of respect. But officials also emphasized that, as a public university, K-State must uphold First Amendment protections — including speech people may find "offensive, racist, derogatory or vile."

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Voting Rights Ruling Could Reshape Political Power From Congress to City Hall

The U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision weakening a key section of the federal Voting Rights Act could dramatically reshape political power not only in Congress, but also in state legislatures, county commissions, city councils, school boards, and even local courts across the country.

Much of the national conversation has focused on how the ruling could affect congressional districts ahead of the 2026 elections. But legal experts and voting rights advocates say the deeper and longer-lasting impact may happen closer to home — particularly in Southern states where many Black elected officials serve in majority-Black districts created under the Voting Rights Act.

The court's 6-3 decision in *Louisiana v. Callais* severely

weakened Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, a landmark civil rights law passed in 1965 to prevent racial discrimination in voting. For decades, Section 2 allowed courts to require states and local governments to draw districts that gave Black and other minority voters a fair opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

Now, critics fear states and local governments will have far more freedom to redraw political maps in ways that dilute minority voting power.

"This is not just about Congress," said Davante Lewis, a member of the Louisiana Public Service Commission and one of the plaintiffs connected to the Louisiana redistricting fight. "This affects who serves on school boards, city councils, county commissions, and state courts."

The impact could be especially significant in the South, where many Black elected officials represent districts created specifically to ensure minority communities had representation after decades of discrimination and voter suppression.

Voting rights groups Fair Fight Action and Black Voters Matter Fund estimate Republicans could potentially gain more than 190 seats in Southern state legislatures if majority-Black districts are weakened or eliminated in future redistricting battles. Many of those seats are currently held by Black lawmakers.

At the local level, the effects could also be widespread. City councils, county boards, and school boards often rely on district maps similar to those used in congressional races. Without strong

federal protections, local governments could redraw district lines in ways that reduce the political influence of Black neighborhoods or divide minority communities among several districts.

Legal experts say officials may increasingly justify those changes as partisan rather than racial decisions because partisan gerrymandering remains largely legal under federal law.

That distinction worries voting rights advocates.

"Legislatures can now say they're targeting political parties, not race, even when the impact falls heavily on Black voters," said Travis Crum, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis who studies voting rights and redistricting.

Some Republican leaders across the country are already calling

for maps to be redrawn following the ruling. Meanwhile, several Democratic-led states are exploring state-level voting rights protections to preserve minority representation.

Ten states currently have their own state voting rights laws, but most Southern states do not.

Critics warn the ruling could weaken the pipeline that has helped Black leaders move from local office to state and national leadership positions. Supporters of the ruling argue districts should be drawn without considering race.

Either way, experts say the full impact of the decision may not become clear until the next round of redistricting after the 2030 Census — when battles over political maps are expected to intensify nationwide.

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From North Side Roots to Federal Contracts: How Floyd Construction Built a 30-Year Legacy

What began as a Wichita plumbing business has grown into a company leading major federal construction projects across multiple states.

By Ty Davis
Wichita Reporter

In a basement on Wichita's North Side, a husband and wife took a leap of faith—combining trade skills, business knowledge, and a vision shaped by the community around them.

Thirty years later, that decision has grown into Floyd Construction Corporation, a company now managing major federal projects and helping shape medical and infrastructure projects across multiple states.

But for Tarrance and Jacqueline Floyd, success was never just about construction.

It was about building something that would last.



Floyd Construction continues expanding its footprint through major federal projects, including work at the Robert J. Dole Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wichita. The company served as contractor for the “Construct Infill of Building 26 for Specialty Clinics and Police Station” project.

A Vision Shaped by Black Entrepreneurship

Long before Floyd Construction was established, Tarrance Floyd was learning what ownership looked like.

Growing up near 13th and Kansas, he was surrounded by Black-owned businesses that modeled independence and leadership. One of those influences was Theodore Jones of Jones Plumbing Company, where Floyd began working as a teenager.

“I worked for Mr. Jones starting in the eighth grade cleaning out his trucks,” Floyd said. “But what stood out wasn’t just the plumbing—it was watching how he ran his business.”

At the time, the 13th and Hydraulic area still reflected a stronger era of Black entrepreneurship, with neighborhood businesses and organizations like the Urban League helping shape the community.

“I always worked for Black entrepreneurs,” Floyd said. “That’s all I saw growing up.”

Those early experiences didn’t just teach him a trade—they shaped his mindset.

From Trade Work to Full Construction



As Floyd Construction plans for the future, the next generation is stepping into larger leadership roles. Pictured left to right are Project Administrator Tarrance Floyd II, company founder Tarrance Floyd, Jacqueline Floyd and General Manager Justine Floyd Duckery. The senior Floyds say they plan to gradually phase out of the company operations over the next five years.

Floyd eventually entered the construction trades when he applied and was accepted into the Joint Apprenticeship Program of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 171. After gaining experience with companies like Star Lumber, Waldinger and Fagan Company, Floyd began seeing a bigger opportunity.

He wasn’t just learning plumbing—he was learning how entire construction projects were managed.

In 1996, he launched Floyd Plumbing starting with residential plumbing and trade-based work. As demand grew, so did the vision.

In 2002, the company expanded into commercial plumbing and HVAC services and changed its name to Floyd Mechanical Corporation, a specialty mechanical contractor.

“I have a business degree,” Jacqueline Floyd said. “So we combined his field experience with my business background.”

Together, they built the company from the basement of their home—one project at a time.

Building Through Pressure

Like many small businesses, Floyd Construction’s early years were defined by sacrifice.

“There were times we didn’t get paid,” Floyd said. “But we made sure our employees did.”

Access to capital and bonding presented ongoing challenges—especially for minority-owned firms.

“You might know how to build a building,” Floyd said, “but if you can’t make the money work, you can’t stay in business.”

Still, one principle carried them forward:

“Don’t quit. The road gets rough, but you can’t quit.”

The Break That Changed Everything

“At first, we were focused on plumbing,” Floyd said. “But we started seeing opportunities to manage entire projects.”

That shift required licensing, bonding, financial strategy and the ability to coordinate multiple trades.

In 2008, Floyd secured his general contracting license and, along with Mr.

Elmer LuGrand — Jacqueline Floyd’s father — partnered to establish Floyd Construction Corporation.

One of the company’s earliest major opportunities came through a service contract with Boeing. At Boeing, the firm was exposed to plant process integration and large equipment installations in an occupied operating environment.

“When you can say you worked at Boeing, people know you’re capable,” Floyd said.

That credibility helped open the door to federal contracting opportunities.

Serving Veterans Through Construction

Military service also plays an important role in the company’s story.

Both Tarrance Floyd and LuGrand had served in the United States Army. LuGrand, who was serving as the organization’s Chief Operating Officer, helped guide the company as it became a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB).

As an SDVOSB, the

company received certain advantages that made it easier to compete for federal contracts.

With this designation, the firm was selected by the Department of Veterans Affairs as a primary contractor across VA hospitals in Wichita, Topeka, Leavenworth, Kansas City and Columbia, MO.

The company leads major hospital additions, renovations and infrastructure upgrades inside active VA medical facilities—work requiring strict safety, infection control and coordination standards.

Today, nearly 90% of Floyd Construction’s work involves projects within the Veterans Affairs Medical Center system, with additional work completed at sites such as McConnell Air Force Base, U.S. Naval Reserve Center in Kansas City and Fort Sill National Cemetery in Lawton.

A Company Built Around People

Even as the company has grown, the Floyds have remained intentional about culture.

“We try to create an environment where people want to work,” Jacqueline Floyd said.

The company employs a core team supported by subcontractors and invests in training and development. Team appreciation remains central—from job sites to shared experiences like attending a Kansas City Chiefs game together.

Building a Family Legacy

Today, the next generation is stepping in.

See FLOYD Page →

Boley Rodeo Fuels Revival in One of America's Historic Black Towns

As Memorial Day crowds return for the historic rodeo, Boley alumni, investors, and redevelopment leaders are helping reshape the town's future.

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

Every Memorial Day weekend, thousands of visitors travel to Boley, Oklahoma, for one of the nation's oldest and longest-running African-American rodeos.

Now, many believe the annual Boley Rodeo is helping fuel something even larger — a broader effort to revive the historic Black town through tourism, redevelopment, cultural pride, and renewed investment in its future.

As this year's rodeo approaches, signs of change are visible throughout the town founded in 1903, four years before Oklahoma became a state.

Last year, visitors arriving at the rodeo grounds saw dramatic improvements after years of wear and decline. The overgrown grounds were cleaned up, the arena was expanded by 50 feet, old wooden bleachers were replaced with modern seating, and upgrades were made to the announcer stand, concession areas, and bullpen spaces.

Karen Ekuban, who returned to Boley in 2020, said the group behind the rodeo renovations inherited facilities badly in need of attention.

"The conditions were very, very poor when we received it," Ekuban said in a recent interview. "The grass was taller than me and you, and it just needed some care and some love."

Ekuban launched Project 2020 Foundation as part of a partnership focused on revitalizing Boley and later joined two partners in successfully bidding to operate the rodeo.

She credited previous organizers with doing the best they could with limited resources, but said grants, partnerships, and reinvestment have helped accelerate improvements in recent years.

The changes are already attracting attention.

Ekuban said more than 5,000 people attended last year's rodeo and organizers had to turn people away after reaching capacity. Organizers expect another sellout this year as word continues spreading about the improvements and the growing energy surrounding the event.

Investment and Redevelopment

Among those helping drive the town's redevelopment effort are Wichita residents Tarrance Floyd and Jackie Floyd, who was born and raised in Boley and graduated from Boley High School in 1981.

The Floyds are helping invest in the town's future through the Boley Bear Plaza project, which includes a Phillips 66 gas station, convenience store, restaurant, and a planned nine-room hotel near Highway 62.

The development is also connected to plans to renovate the former McCormick restaurant building into a welcome center for visitors traveling through Boley.



A rider hangs on during bull riding action at the historic Boley Rodeo, held every Memorial Day weekend in Boley, Oklahoma. The nationally known event is helping draw renewed attention and investment to one of America's historic Black towns.



Jackie Floyd, a Boley native, stands with Boley Historian Judge Henrietta Hicks near the future site of the Boley Bear Plaza development in Boley, OK. Floyd and her husband, Tarrance Floyd, are developing the project, which includes plans for a gas station, convenience store, restaurant, hotel, and welcome center as part of ongoing redevelopment efforts in the historic Black town.

Plans for the building also include a restaurant and additional visitor amenities.

Across the street from the planned welcome center site is the marker identifying Boley as a stop on Oklahoma's Civil Rights Trail. The statewide trail highlights locations connected to Black history and civil rights

history, including Tulsa's Greenwood District and several of Oklahoma's remaining historic Black towns.

A Town With Deep History

Boley was once among more than 50 all-Black towns established in Oklahoma by formerly enslaved African-Americans seeking land

ownership, opportunity, and self-governance after Reconstruction. Today, only 13 remain.

At its peak, Boley had banks, cotton gins, an electric company, brick plants, businesses, and a thriving downtown district. By 1910,



Groundwater, Health, and You.

A Clear Way Forward: Free Health Testing

These tests look for health effects that may be linked to contaminated groundwater exposure.



FREE Health testing events provided by the **Wichita Black Nurses Association** for those in the **29th & Grove Area**

- **Saturday, May 16, 2026** 10am-2pm
St Mary Missionary Baptist Church
1648 E 17th St N, Wichita, KS
- Saturday, May 30, 2026** 9am-12pm
- **Chisholm Trail Church of Christ**
5833 E 37th St N, Wichita, KS
- Saturday, June 6, 2026** 11am-2pm
- **Carl Brewer Community Center**
1329 E 13th St N, Wichita, KS
- Saturday, June 13, 2026** 10 am-2 pm
- **St Paul AME Church**
1756 N Piatt Ave., Wichita, KS
- Saturday, June 20, 2026** 10 am-2 pm
- The Bridge Church**
2328 E 13th N, Wichita, KS



FLOYD, from Page 4 ↓

Their daughter, Justine Floyd Duckery, serves as General Manager, while their son, Tarrance Floyd II, works as Project Administrator.

“We’re grateful we’ve stayed in business long enough to bring our children into it,” Jacqueline said.

In addition to his work in construction, Floyd also serves as senior pastor at Mt. Gilead Missionary Baptist Church in Wichita. His Christian beliefs help shape how he leads and serves others.

Looking Toward the Future

Floyd Construction is now managing some of the largest projects in the company’s history, marking a major milestone.

The company continues expanding its reach, including into Oklahoma, while developing future leaders within the organization.

The senior Floyd’s plan to gradually step back over the next several years.

“I’ll probably spend more time riding horses and driving my old-school cars,” he said.

Meanwhile, Jacqueline founded Whispering Meadows Retreat, a spiritual retreat home dedicated to helping people care for their

souls by providing sanctuary, solitude and support.

More Than a Business

Thirty years after launching their company from a basement office, Tarrance and Jacqueline Floyd say they never imagined how far the journey would go.

For Wichita, Floyd Construction represents more than a successful business. It represents perseverance, faith and the power of a vision planted decades ago on the North Side of the city.

And with new opportunities ahead, the Floyd family’s story — and the legacy of Floyd Construction — is still being written.

RODEO, from Page 5 ↓

the town’s population had grown to more than 1,300 residents.

But like many rural communities, Boley later struggled with population decline as farming and railroad activity faded. By 1980, the population had dropped to just over 400 residents. Since then, the town has steadily rebounded, growing back to nearly 1,100 residents by the 2020 Census — a sign many residents see as part of Boley’s continuing comeback.

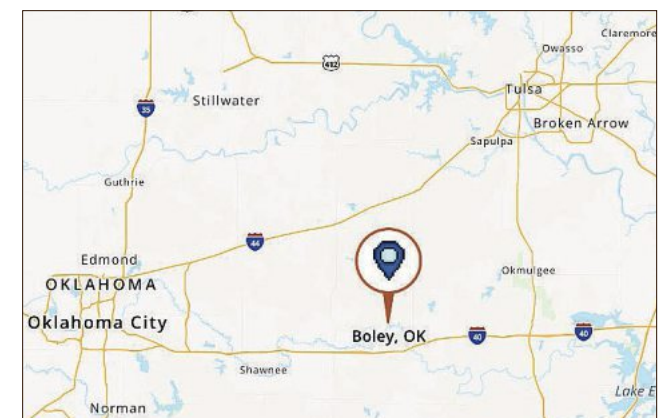
Today, local leaders see heritage tourism and cultural events like the rodeo as an important part of Boley’s future.

Mayor Dr. Francis Shelton, who also owns the town’s hardware store, described rodeo weekend as a giant homecoming for families spread across the country.

“It brings family home,” Shelton said. “There’s excitement in the air.”

What Visitors Can Expect

This year’s rodeo takes place Saturday, May 23, at the Boley Rodeo Arena, but the town is expected to buzz throughout Memorial Day weekend with reunions, food



Boley, Oklahoma, is located about three hours south of Wichita and roughly five hours southwest of Kansas City. The historic Black town draws thousands of visitors each Memorial Day weekend for the annual Boley Rodeo.

vendors, music, and visitors arriving from across the country.

The celebration traditionally includes a parade through town before crowds gather for children’s rodeo activities, entertainment, food, shopping vendors, and the evening rodeo itself.

One fan favorite is Pony Express, a fast-paced relay-style horseback event organizers describe as unique to Boley and unlike anything many visitors have seen at other rodeos.

Tickets are available through the official Town of Boley website at thetownofboley.org and cost \$20 for

general admission and \$35 for reserved seating.

Organizers encourage visitors to buy tickets early and print them in advance because cellphone and internet reception in the rural area can be unreliable. Visitors are also encouraged to bring cash since digital payment systems may not always work consistently during the event.

For many who return each year, the rodeo is about more than entertainment.

It is about preserving history, strengthening community ties, and helping ensure one of America’s historic Black towns continues moving forward.

Feeling fine

29th and Grove Groundwater Contamination

What Residents Need to Know

A lot of people don't realize there's contaminated groundwater in part of northeast Wichita. And even if you've heard about it, you may not know what it means for you or your family. Here's the story in a nutshell — and why it matters. Because understanding it is the first step to protecting your health.



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Contaminated Groundwater? How Did That Happen

The contamination didn't happen overnight.

The best understanding is that it started with a chemical spill near the Georgia-Pacific railroad tracks, just north of 29th and Grove.

That area sits at the north end of what's now Glen Dey Park.

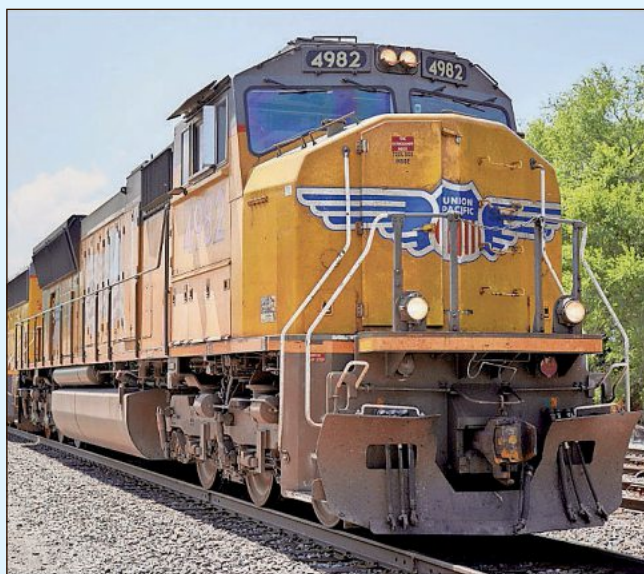
Experts believe the spill may have happened sometime in the 1970s or 1980s — but it wasn't discovered until the 1990s.

Back then, rules were different.

It wasn't unusual for companies to dump chemical waste on the ground — or even into nearby streams.

There were few regulations, and less awareness about how dangerous that could be.

The first major federal law to control hazardous waste — the **Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)** — took effect in 1976, with stronger enforcement rules rolling



out in the early 1980s.

By then, contamination had already happened in many places across the country.

Wichita was no exception.

There were hundreds of contaminated sites identified across the city — many from a time when the long-term risks simply weren't understood.

Cruiser/K96 Lake Contamination



Cruiser Lake, often called K-96 Lake, sits near both the 29th and Grove contamination site and the former Johns' Sludge Pond site near K-96 and I-135. Because of its proximity to the contamination areas, KDHE tested the lake's water and sediment for TCE contamination in 2022 and found no evidence the lake had been impacted by the 29th and Grove spill.

However, the lake is known to have contamination from polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a different chemical that has also been found at the nearby Johns' Sludge Pond site — not the TCE spill connected to the Union Pacific rail yard. Due to the presence of PCBs in some fish in the lake, KDHE recommends restricting consumption of bottom-feeding fish — including buffalo, carp, sturgeon and suckers — and catfish to one serving per month.

Groundwater Contamination Discovered

The contamination was discovered during a construction project on 21st Street in Northeast Wichita. The contamination was traced back to the Union Pacific Railyard near 29th and Grove. That was 1994, but that information wasn't widely shared — especially not with the community.

In fact, a December 1996 article in the Wichita Eagle highlighted what it called the "Dirty Dozen," identifying the city's serious contamination sites.

The 29th and Grove spill wasn't on that list.

It did, however, include contamination at what was known as John's Sludge Pond — located southeast of the curve of K-96 and I-135.

Between 1951 and 1970, the Super Refined Oil Co., a used-oil recycling company, dumped about **400 truckloads of chemicals and oily sludge into a pit near 29th Street and Hydraulic.**

With manufacturing and oil refineries nearby, northeast Wichita had become, in many ways, a dumping ground.

Still, there was no mention of the 29th and Grove spill — at least not to the community — until 2003.



So What Exactly Was Spilled?

The main concern is a chemical called **TCE** — **trichloroethylene**.

It's a man-made chemical that was widely used by manufacturers and businesses, mostly to clean metal parts and equipment. It's also been used in things like paint removers and degreasers.

TCE was made in a laboratory in 1836 but was not produced for sale until 1908. Widespread production began in Germany in 1920 and in the United States in 1925.

SURPRISING FACT

TCE was first used as a painkiller and as anesthesia. It was

thought to be less toxic to the liver than chloroform and less flammable than ether. It was given to women during childbirth for decades. It was banned for that use in the U.S. in 1977 because of concerns about harm to newborn babies but was still used in Europe until the 1980s.

Years ago, TCE could be found in products like:

- Paint removers
- Spot removers (for fabrics)
- Adhesives and glues
- Cleaning solvents

Most of those uses have been **phased out or restricted** due to health concerns.

How The Spill Traveled 2.9 Miles South To Murdock

Groundwater isn't an underground lake. It's water filling tiny spaces between sand, gravel and rock—more like a soaked sponge beneath the ground. The soil and rock stay packed in place, but the water can move slowly through those spaces, usually downhill or toward areas of lower pressure.

When TCE reaches that groundwater, some of it dissolves into the water and begins moving with it. But it doesn't move perfectly. Some of it sticks to soil along the way, slowing it down. And some gets trapped in small pockets underground, where it doesn't move at all.

Over time, those trapped pockets slowly release TCE into the water, continuing to feed the contamination. That's how a plume forms—spreading with the flow of groundwater while also being continually replenished from pockets left behind, **forming what's known as a plume, or a long, spreading area of contaminated groundwater.**

The speed of that movement depends on the type of soil. In

tighter soils like clay, groundwater may move only a few feet per year. In sandier areas, it can move much faster—sometimes hundreds of feet per year. For a plume to travel nearly 3 miles since the 1970s, groundwater would likely have been moving on the order of **300 feet per year**—fast for groundwater, but realistic in sandy, gravel-rich conditions.



What Happens When TCE is Spilled?

When TCE is spilled, it doesn't just sit there.

Some of it can evaporate into the air. But a lot of it can soak into the ground where it can get into well water or ground water, once it gets there.

That's what happened here.

A significant amount of the spilled TCE moved underground.

Once it gets into groundwater, it doesn't stay in one place.

It spreads.

And over time, that's exactly what happened.

By 1994, when it was first discovered, the contamination had already spread as far south as 21st Street.

Today, it has moved 2.9 miles south from the Union Pacific Railway yard — to as far south as Murdock. far south as Murdock, following the natural flow of groundwater beneath the surface.



BY THE NUMBERS: THE SPREAD

2.9 MILES

South from 29th & Grove to Murdock

UP TO 7 BLOCKS WIDE

Between Hydraulic (west) and Poplar (east)
2,800 Homes Inside the area

TENS OF THOUSANDS

People impacted over time

TCE Can Be Cancerous

TCE isn't just a chemical — it's a serious health concern.

It has been linked to several types of cancer, including kidney cancer, liver cancer, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

But cancer isn't the only risk.

Exposure has also been connected to problems with the immune system, liver and kidney damage, and developmental issues in children.

So How Are People Exposed?

It's not just about drinking the water.

You can be exposed in several ways.

Drinking or ingesting it is one of the most direct ways — whether it's through tap water or something as simple as water used in cooking.

Washing vegetables helps reduce risk, but it

doesn't eliminate concern entirely if the water itself is contaminated.

But it can also happen **through the air.**

TCE can evaporate from contaminated water or soil and move into homes. That means people can **breathe it** in without even knowing it.

It can also happen through **skin contact.**

That could be kids playing in muddy areas, people gardening, or anyone working directly with the soil.

Even something like water sitting in a backyard or in a baby pool can become a concern if contamination is present.

In places like Glen Dey Park, where people gather, play, and spend time outdoors, concerns have also been raised about how close contamination may be to areas like open fields and football fields.

The key point is this:

Exposure doesn't always look obvious.

And many people may not realize the different ways it can happen.



Is My Water Safe To Drink?

It depends on where your water comes from.

If You Have A Private Well

If you live in the contaminated area and use a **private well**, the answer is simple:

DO NOT DRINK THE WATER.

Wells pull water directly from the groundwater — and that's where the contamination is.

That means the water can carry TCE.

It's also best to **avoid using that water for anything where you might come into contact with it.**

That includes:

- Drinking or cooking
- Filling a child's pool
- Letting kids play in it

The goal is to limit contact as much as possible.

Using the water in a garden is generally considered **lower risk**, especially if produce is washed well — but even then, reducing contact when possible is the safest approach.

If you have a private well used for drinking water, you're encouraged to contact the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE).

They can help arrange to have the well **closed at no cost to you.**

Call KDHE at **785-296-8896** for more information.

Why You Should Get Tested

Study Shows Elevated Cancer Rates in Contamination Area

As more became known about TCE and its links to cancer, concerns grew for residents living near the 29th and Grove contamination site — many of whom had spent decades in the area without knowing they could have been exposed.

TCE has been associated with an increased risk of kidney, liver and biliary

cancers, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, as well as other health effects.

With those risks in mind, Wichita city officials pushed for answers. They insisted that a formal health study be conducted to determine whether residents in the area were experiencing higher rates of those same illnesses.

The results of that study were released in May 2023.

Researchers examined nearly 2,800 addresses in the affected area and specifically looked at cancers tied to TCE exposure, including kidney cancer, renal pelvis cancer,

urinary bladder cancer, and lymphoma. The study found a significantly higher incidence of liver and biliary tract cancers — 15.7 cases per 100,000 people, compared to 6.4 per 100,000 in Kansas and 8.0 per 100,000 in Sedgwick County. It also identified other concerns, including higher rates of low birth weight among infants.

Despite those findings, health officials urged caution. They said the study could not definitively link the elevated cancer rates to TCE exposure, noting that cancer can be influenced by

many factors.

Still, for residents, the overlap was hard to ignore.

Community members and local leaders began urging people who live — or have lived — in the area to get screened, particularly for cancers associated with TCE. Efforts also began to secure funding to ensure testing would be available.

For many, the study marked a turning point — from uncertainty to action.

With the funding secured, the next step was building the team to carry out the testing.

What Spill? Residents Say They Were Never Truly Informed

For many residents, a 2023 public meeting about the 29th and Grove groundwater contamination was the first time they learned the spill existed. But according to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the state first

attempted to notify the community in 2003.

KDHE says legal notices were issued and outreach efforts included mailers to residents. However, searches of archived editions of The Community Voice and

Newspaper.com did not locate a legal notice about the spill from 2002 or 2003.

Even for those who vaguely remembered hearing something years earlier, many said the contamination never seemed urgent or dangerous.

When KDHE returned in 2023 to provide an update on cleanup efforts, and residents learned they were living above a TCE spill, the meeting quickly turned emotional and confrontational.

"It was an awakening," many

residents said, questioning how contamination discovered in 1994 could remain largely unknown for decades.

Former Wichita City Councilmember LaVonta Williams called the situation "environmental racism," saying

even as a councilmember she had never been informed about the contamination.

State officials acknowledged the earlier outreach had not reached enough people and pledged to improve communication moving forward.

For Decades, The Florence Family Drank The Water

For more than 70 years, Terrell Florence's family has lived in northeast Wichita, relying on well water they believed was safe.

Florence said his family moved into the neighborhood in 1954, and at times as many as 15 relatives lived in the home together. Like many families in the area, they drank the water, cooked with it, and used it every day — never knowing contaminated groundwater was beneath them.

Over time, cancer repeatedly struck the Florence family.

"Both my parents had some form of cancer. Three of my sisters have had cancer. My oldest brother has had cancer," Florence said.

He said many of the cancers involved the lymphatic system, one of the health concerns associated with TCE exposure.

Florence said the family knew for years that something about the water seemed different, but they were told it was likely minerals causing the unusual taste.

In 2023, uncomfortable with the free testing provided through KDHE, the Florence family paid for professional independent testing of the water at their northeast Wichita home. That testing



Terrell Florence sits on the porch of his northeast Wichita home with his great-grandson. Florence said his family lived in the area for decades, relying on well water before learning their property was located in the path of the 29th and Grove groundwater contamination plume.

found TCE contamination levels of 334 parts per billion in one part of the house and 706 parts per billion in another. The EPA's acceptable drinking water limit for TCE is 5 parts per billion.

"This is real," Florence said.

"People need to stop thinking this can't affect them."

Now, his message to residents who lived, worked, attended school, or spent significant time in the contamination area is simple: Get tested.

Oletha Faust-Goudeau, and Reps. Ford Carr, Susan Estes and K.C. Ohaebosim, along with other members of the Kansas Legislature who supported the effort.

At the local level, Wichita City Councilmember Brandon Johnson and Sedgwick County Commissioner Ron Baty helped move the process forward and ensure the funding could be used in ways that directly benefit residents.



A number of state and local leaders were instrumental in securing the funding, including Gov. Laura Kelly, Sen.

You Can Get Tested For Free

Free health screenings are now available for people who may have been exposed to contaminated groundwater in northeast Wichita.

Who Should Get Tested

Anyone who has lived, worked, attended school or church — or spent significant time — in the impacted area should consider getting tested.

The contamination zone includes at least 2,800 homes, along with businesses, churches, and community facilities. Over the more than 50-year life of the spill, that adds up to tens of thousands of people who may have been exposed.

What Does the Testing Include

The FREE testing looks for specific health issues related to exposure to groundwater contamination, not levels of harmful chemicals in the body. You're asked to bring your driver's license or state issued ID.

Blood tests that:

- Measure liver and kidney function
- Look for anemia and other problems
- Screen for certain liver concerns

Urinalysis

A urine test checks for blood and other indicators of health.

Testing Partners

The Clearway Testing Program is the grant-funded effort and brings together authorized partners to provide **no-cost health screenings** for individuals who may have been impacted.

These Are the Testing Partners

GraceMed Health

1150 N. Broadway
Schedule online: <https://www.gracemed.org/clearwaytesting>
Call: (316) 866-2000

Hunter Health

527 N. Grove
Appointments required: Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Call: (316) 262-2415

Be sure to mention "TCE testing" or "groundwater contamination testing."

HealthCore Clinic

2707 E. 21st St. N.

Offers walk-in and appointment-based testing

Walk-In Hours:

• Monday – Thursday: 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Saturday: 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

• Walk-ins not available on Fridays
Appointments can also be requested online: <https://healthcoreclinic.org/clearwaytesting>

I Am Wichita Clinic/Love Medical Clinic & Spa

214 S. Road Road, #101
(316) 669-4770

I Am Wichita is also partnering with Clearway Testing to provide screenings as part of this community-wide effort.

Wichita Black Nurses

Providing community-based testing throughout the area.

For additional dates, visit: www.wichitabn.org

May & June WBNA Testing Dates and Locations

• **Sat., May 16, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

Greater St. Mary's Baptist Church

1648 E. 17th St. N.

• **Sat., May 30, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

Chisholm Trail Church of Christ

5833 E. 37th St. N.

• **Sat., June 8, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

Carl Brewer Community Center

1349 N Ohio

• **Sat., June 13, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

St. Paul AME Church

1756 N. Piatt

• **Sat., June 20, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

The Bridge Church

1329 E. 13th St. N.

Funding Secured to Provide Free Cancer Testing for Residents

When the health study revealed elevated rates of liver cancer in residents impacted by the groundwater contamination, local officials and community leaders moved quickly to secure funding to ensure residents could be tested at no cost.

The Kansas Health Foundation played a leading role in organizing the local match, helping bring together contributions from multiple partners to meet the state's requirement.

Free Testing For 29th & Grove

If you lived, worked, went to school, went to church, or spent time near 29th & Grove or surrounding neighborhoods from the 1970s to today, consider getting tested.



Clearway Testing is a community-led effort that brings together local clinics and organizations to make it easier to:

- Understand potential exposure
- Receive health tests at no cost
- Connect with a licensed medical provider

Don't Wait

Get Your Free Health Test Today

Clearway Testing partners are here to help the 29th & Grove community.
Contact a testing partner today to get your free health test.



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gracemed.org/clearwaytesting



(316) 691-0249
healthcoreclinic.org/clearwaytesting



(316) 262-2415
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Health tests from Clearway partners are free through December 31, 2026 and include a blood and urine test. No insurance or ID needed. These tests check your health for possible effects from past groundwater contamination. Testing is quick and handled by trusted medical professionals. Eligibility: Free health testing is available through Clearway partners if you believe you may have been exposed to contaminated groundwater in Sedgwick County.

“The Dream Team”: How One Principal Built a Rare Group of Black Male Teachers

At Buckner Performing Arts and Science Magnet Elementary School, Principal Tara Hall has a name for something rarely seen in American classrooms.

“My dream team,” she calls them.

Three Black men teaching 5th grade — in the same building, at the same time — a level of representation that stands out not just in Wichita, but nationwide.

Nationally, Black men make up just 1.3% of the nation’s 3.8 million public school teachers, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

At Buckner, that reality looks different — by design.

Building the Dream Team

Hall didn’t arrive at this moment by chance. She built toward it.

Years ago, when she hired Dwaune Bradley as a new teacher at White Elementary, he became the first Black male teacher on her staff. From the beginning, she understood what that presence could mean for students.

“I wanted the little Black boys to see that you can be cool, play basketball, wear the Jordans — and still be educated,” Hall said.

Bradley would follow Hall to Clark and now to Buckner, where that vision has grown.

When Hall arrived at Buckner, Michael Anderson was already on staff but considering leaving. She persuaded him to stay.

“He believed in my vision,” she said.

The final piece came through a connection with a leadership coach — longtime educator Michael Gaither — who knew Hall and helped connect her with his son, Langston Gaither.

At the time, Langston was teaching in Philadelphia. His father wanted him in a place that felt more stable and supportive, and brought him to Wichita for a visit.

Langston toured Buckner, met Hall and decided it was the right fit.

With all three in place, Hall recognized the opportunity for her 5th grade students at a critical point in their lives — especially for the boys.

A Critical Age for Influence

She believes 5th grade is a turning point.

“This is when young men are starting to transition,” Hall said. “They’re beginning to understand the world, and you can talk to them about how to carry themselves.”

Those conversations, she said, often land differently coming from someone students identify with.



Principal Tara Hall stands with the three 5th grade teachers she calls her “dream team,” a rare group of Black male educators she intentionally brought together at Buckner Elementary. (L-R) Dwaune Bradley, Hall, Langston Gaither and Michael Anderson.



5th grade teacher Langston Gaither leads his classrooms at Buckner Elementary, where his presence is part of a broader effort to connect with students and build confidence early.

“It’s different hearing it from a young Black man,” she said. “He’s cool. He’s playing basketball with them during recess.”

Over the course of a school year, those daily interactions build something lasting.

“They have all year to drop little nuggets,” Hall said. “By the time those students leave us, they’ve gained so much.”

How It Plays Out in the Classroom

Inside their classrooms, that vision takes shape in different ways.

For Bradley, the focus is starting early.

Now in his sixth year teaching, he believes the key to changing long-term outcomes is reaching students before patterns are set.

“With issues like teen violence, I believe reaching kids at the elementary level can make a real

difference,” Bradley said.

He sees the work as building habits — discipline, accountability and consistency — that students carry with them beyond the classroom.

One Student at a Time

For Anderson, the impact often shows up one student at a time.

He recalled a student who struggled with behavior — leaving class, cursing at teachers and falling behind academically.

Through structure and consistent expectations, that student began to change — completing work, improving behavior and taking responsibility.

Later, Anderson ran into the student’s family outside of school.

“His mom told me he’s doing better academically and behavior-wise,” Anderson said. “It was a totally different kid.”

Expanding What Students See

Gaither approaches the work through identity.

Once known primarily as an athlete himself, he understands how limiting labels can be.

“I had teachers that pushed me to be more than that,” Gaither said.

Now, he works to help students see broader possibilities — not just in what they do, but in who they can become.

More Than Academics

Like other teachers, they are often managing more than academics — helping students navigate stress, instability and challenges that follow them into the classroom.

But the connection they build can make that work more effective.

Hall said the impact extends beyond the boys.

Court Fight Could Decide Which Map Kansas City Votes Under

Appeal May determine whether new congressional districts take effect before voters weigh in

By Bonita Gooch
Editor In Chief

Kansas City voters — and Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II — could soon learn which congressional map will be used in this year's election as a key court decision approaches May 12.

That hearing focuses on an appeal in **Maggard v. State of Missouri**, which will decide whether Missouri's new congressional map takes effect now or is paused while a citizen-led referendum process continues.

Right now, the new map is allowed to be used. But that could change.

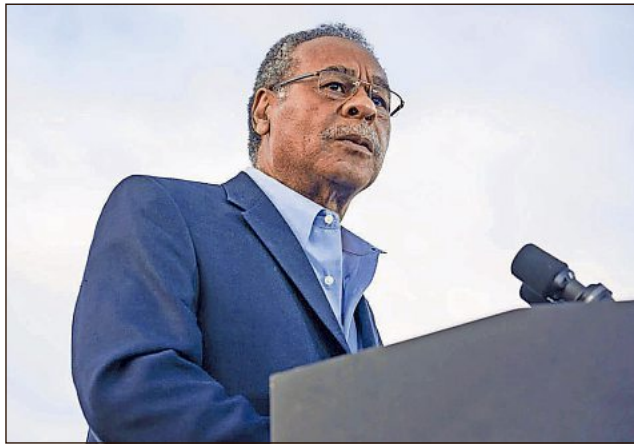
Push For Redistricting Tied To National Politics

The redistricting effort in Missouri is part of a broader push by Republicans, encouraged by former President Donald Trump, to redraw congressional maps in key states and strengthen control of the U.S. House during the second half of his term.

Missouri's new map is widely viewed as more favorable to Republicans and could help the party gain a seat in Congress — in part by reshaping the Kansas City-area district currently represented by Cleaver.

Kansas City Divided Along Troost

The new district lines split Kansas City in a way that closely follows the historic Troost Avenue dividing line.



U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver's election path will be decided next when with the Missouri Supreme Court considers the appeal of Maggard v. State of Missouri.

Under the map:

- **Areas east of Troost remain in the 5th Congressional District**, represented by Cleaver

- **Areas west of Troost are moved into the 4th Congressional District**, joining more rural and central Missouri counties

Critics say that shift breaks apart the core of Kansas City's voting base and connects parts of the city to regions with very different political and economic interests.

"We're gonna have three members of Congress... different parts of Kansas City," Cleaver said during a recent Urban Summit meeting.

Referendum Aims To Change Who Draws The Maps

The legal fight is tied to a broader effort to change how Missouri draws its political districts.

People Not Politicians, a nonpartisan organization, is leading a petition initiative that would shift control of redistricting away from elected officials and place it in the hands of an **independent citizens commission**.

Supporters say the goal is to reduce partisan gerrymandering and take politics out of the process.

More than 300,000 signatures have been submitted — widely believed to be enough to qualify — but they **have not yet been officially certified**.

When the petitions were turned in, Denny Hoskins said election officials would have **until late July** to verify the signatures and determine whether the measure will appear on the November ballot.

Under Missouri law, the vote would typically occur during the next general election unless the governor calls a special election.

What The May 12 Hearing Will Decide

The May 12 hearing does not determine whether the referendum happens. Instead, it focuses on whether the state can move forward with the new map before that process is complete.

A lower court judge previously ruled the map can take effect, declining to block it even after the petition was submitted.

That decision is now under appeal.

- **If the court upholds the ruling:** The new map will likely be used in this election

- **If the court overturns it:** The state could be required to use the current map until the referendum process plays out

A Break From Past Practice?

Opponents argue the state's approach differs from how similar cases have been handled in the past.

In 2017, Missouri's right-to-work law was **put on hold after signatures were submitted**, allowing voters to weigh in before it took effect. At the time, then-Secretary of

State Jay Ashcroft confirmed the law would not be implemented while the referendum process moved forward.

In this case, however, the new congressional map is being allowed to proceed — at least for now — while legal challenges continue.

Ballot Language Fight Clarified

Separately, courts have ruled on how the referendum will be presented to voters.

A lawsuit challenged ballot language written by Hoskins, arguing it favored the new map and could mislead voters.

The Missouri Court of Appeals Western District

agreed and rewrote the summary, removing:

- References to the current map as "gerrymandered"
- Claims that the new map better reflects voting patterns or fairness

The court limited the language to statements that can be verified directly in law, such as how many counties are split between districts.

Why It Matters

An appeal to the Missouri Supreme Court could reshape Kansas City's congressional map — and U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II's reelection race.

A hearing is scheduled next week in *Maggard v. State of Missouri*.

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Family Describes Watching Charles Adair Die After Viewing Jail Video

Video reviewed by relatives shows final moments before Wyandotte County deputy was charged with murder in Adair's jail death.

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in-Chief

The family of Charles Adair said they were devastated after viewing body camera video Wednesday showing the final moments before the 50-year-old Kansas City, Kansas, man died inside the Wyandotte County Detention Center last summer.

"We basically watched our loved one die," said Erica Adair. "They knelt on his back until he was breathless."

The viewing marked a major moment in a case that has already led to both criminal charges against a former detention deputy and a federal wrongful death lawsuit filed by Adair's family.



Charles Adair

Adair died July 5, 2025, after being taken into custody on misdemeanor traffic violations. According to court filings and statements from attorneys, Adair had been receiving treatment for an infected open wound in the jail infirmary before he was wheeled back to his cell in a wheelchair.

Investigators say a confrontation began once he returned to the cell.

According to court records cited



Erica Adair speaks during a Wednesday news conference outside the Wyandotte County Courthouse after family members viewed body camera video connected to the in-custody death of her brother, Charles Adair. Their mother, Ruby Smith, listens beside her.

during Wednesday's news conference, Adair was lifted from the wheelchair, placed face down on the bottom bunk of his cell and restrained while handcuffed. Deputy Richard Fatherly allegedly knelt on Adair's back for roughly 90 seconds to two minutes while Adair was on his stomach and handcuffed.

The Johnson County Medical

Examiner's Office ruled Adair's death a homicide caused by complications of mechanical asphyxia.

Fatherly has since been charged with second-degree murder and an alternative count of involuntary manslaughter in Wyandotte County District Court.

Earlier this month, Adair's family also filed a federal wrongful death

lawsuit against Fatherly, Wyandotte County Sheriff Daniel Soptic and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas.

The family is represented by national civil rights attorneys Ben Crump and Harry Daniels along with Kansas City-area law firm Davis, Bethune & Jones.

Speaking outside the Wyandotte County Courthouse after the family viewed the footage for the first time, attorneys and relatives said the video confirmed what they feared happened inside the jail.

"A traffic violation shouldn't be a death sentence," Adair family Atty. Ted Ruzicka said during the news conference.

The family's attorneys are also calling for the video to eventually be released publicly, though they acknowledged that may not happen before trial.

The criminal case against Fatherly is continuing in Wyandotte County, with another court hearing expected later this month. The federal civil lawsuit is also in its early stages.

KANSAS CITY NEWS BRIEFS

KC Residents Invited to Help Shape Rules for Dangerous, Vacant Buildings

Voice News Service Kansas City residents will have two opportunities next week to weigh in on proposed city rules aimed at addressing dangerous, vacant, and abandoned properties across the city. The

listening sessions come as the City Council considers three separate ordinances focused on securing neglected buildings, protecting historic properties, and holding owners of long-term nuisance properties more accountable.

One proposal, Ordinance 260399, would establish minimum standards for "mothballing" vacant buildings. Property owners would be required to secure doors and

windows, protect structures from weather damage, maintain exterior conditions, and improve safety for firefighters and other emergency responders entering the properties. Supporters say the measure is intended to reduce hazards while preventing further deterioration.

A second proposal, Ordinance 260400, focuses on historic preservation. Under the ordinance, certain historic

buildings declared dangerous could not be demolished without review by the Historic Preservation Commission, unless emergency conditions require immediate action to protect public safety. The measure is intended to prevent historically significant buildings from being torn down without additional oversight.

The third measure, Ordinance 260401, would expand vacant property registration requirements to include vacant lots and unimproved land. It would also require owners to disclose their plans for vacant properties and impose a \$200 semiannual fee on chronically vacant nuisance properties meeting specific criteria. City leaders say the proposal is designed to encourage property maintenance and redevelopment while discouraging long-term neglect.

Residents are encouraged to attend the sessions to learn more about the proposals and



Melissa Patterson Hazley

share how vacant or dangerous properties are affecting their neighborhoods.

The 3rd District listening session will be held Monday, May 11, at 6 p.m. at the Mary Williams-Neal Community Center.

The 5th District listening session is scheduled for Wednesday, May 13, at 6 p.m. at Ruskin High School.

Free KC Pet Vaccine Day Set for May 30 at Swope Park

Kansas City pet owners can access free vaccinations, microchipping, city pet licenses, and

pet supplies during the third annual Pawstive Protection – KC Community Vaccine Day on Saturday, May 30. The drive-thru event will take place from 9 a.m. to noon at Swope Park near 3999 Swope Parkway and 3999 E. Meyer Blvd. Organizers say the event is designed to help families keep pets healthy, safe, and properly cared for while also supporting neighborhood animal wellness. Services are available for dogs and cats while supplies last. Participants must be Kansas City residents and provide proof of residency at check-in. Residents are asked to remain in their vehicles throughout the event. No registration is required. The event is presented by Melissa Patterson Hazley and the City of Kansas City with support from local animal welfare organizations, veterinary partners, KCPD, Parks & Recreation, and the Department of Neighborhood Services.

Family is everything, and so is your home.

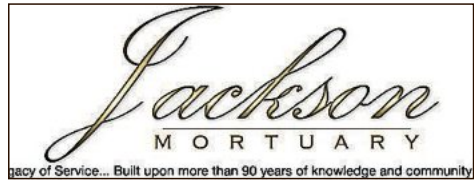
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Rose Turner - Earp, 74

April 28, 1951 - Apr 10, 2026
Service was held April 18 at St. Mark Cathedral Church of God in Christ

Claude Daniels Jr., 74

February 26, 1952 – April 13, 2026
Graveside Service was held April 22 at Winfield Veterans Cemetery

Jesse L. Staley, 91

March 21, 1935 – May 3, 2026
Service will be held at 1 pm on May 16 at Calvary Baptist Church, 2653 N. Hillside.

Robbie “Michelle” Baird, 48

January 30, 1978 – April 29, 2026
Service will be held at 10 am on May 21 at Eastside Cathedral of Praise COGIC, 5955 E. 29th.

Valerie Salton-Alford, 65

July 20, 1960 – April 29, 2026
Service will be held at 11 am on May 15th at Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, 1654 N Mathewson

Keith Daniel Hill, 64

January 14, 1962 – April 28, 2026
Service will be held at 11 am on May 14 at St. Mark United Methodist Church, 1525 N Lorraine.

Annie Delores Parnell - Moore, 75

December 18, 1950 – April 19, 2026
Service will be held at 2 pm on May 16 at Jackson Mortuary, 1125 E 13th.

Wilkie W. Berry, 85

June 24, 1940 – April 19, 2026
Service will be held at 2 pm on May 8 at Dellrose United Methodist Church, 1502 Dellrose.

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5th grade teacher Michael Anderson lead classrooms at Buckner Elementary, where his presence is part of a broader effort to connect with students and build confidence early.

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DREAM TEAM from Page 15 ↓

“Not only the boys — the girls as well,” she said. “They’re comfortable with a Black man leading their classroom.”

Building What Is Rare

Building a team like this takes intention.

Black male educators remain rare, and Hall said finding them requires effort.

“You have to seek them out,” she said. “They’re not always coming out of universities in large numbers, and many are looking for more lucrative careers.”

While many schools may

have one, two or no Black teachers, Buckner has nine across grade levels and specialties.

Even so, Hall is clear about what she is building.

“I’m not just looking for a Black teacher,” Hall said. “I’m looking for someone who is qualified and has the experiences that are beneficial to our children.”

Built With Purpose

What is happening at Buckner is not accidental.

It is built.

For many children, the first example of what they might become is standing right in front of them.



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