

# THE VOICE

A trusted voice from the community's perspective



# JUNETEENTH 2026

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# THE VOICE

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 12  
FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2026

## MORE WAYS TO CONNECT

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# Help Us Honor Jackson Mortuary 100 Years. 100 Tributes.

By **Bonita Gooch**  
Editor, In Chief

For nearly a century, the Jackson family has been there for Wichita families during life's most difficult moments.

On July 10, Jackson Mortuary will celebrate 100 years in business—a remarkable milestone that makes it Wichita's oldest continuously operating Black-owned family business, still owned and operated by the same family that founded it in 1926.

But this anniversary isn't just about a business.

It's about generations of families served, churches supported, community organizations sponsored and countless acts of quiet generosity that have helped shape Wichita's Black community.

For many, the memories extend far beyond funeral services. They remember Jackson Mortuary purchasing church anniversary ads year after year, buying candy bars and cookies from neighborhood children raising money for school or youth groups, supporting community organizations, sponsoring events and always finding ways to give back.

Now it's the community's turn to say thank you.

To mark the anniversary, **The Community Voice** is launching **100 Years. 100 Tributes**. We're inviting readers to share memories of how the Jackson family has made a difference in their lives, their families, their churches or their



Members of the Jackson family who continue the funeral home's century-long legacy are (Seated) Michael Jackson (Standing L-R) Jamaun "Buddy" Jackson, Deborah Jackson and Chastity Jackson, Torrance Jackson, Jackson Mortuary will celebrate its 100th anniversary on July 10 as Wichita's oldest continuously operating Black-owned family business.

organizations.

Leave your tribute in the comments on our pinned Facebook post, send it by email or mail or drop off a handwritten letter. If you have a photograph that helps tell your story—whether it's a family photo, a church event, an old funeral program, a newspaper clipping or another meaningful keepsake—we'd love to see that, too.

Selected tributes will be featured on The Community Voice website, highlighted in future print editions and shared throughout the celebration. At the conclusion of the project, the complete collection of tributes will be presented to the Jackson family as a centennial keepsake honoring 100 years of service to Wichita families.

If you'd like to learn more

### Every Legacy Has a Story

Before sharing your own memory, take a look back at the remarkable history of Jackson Mortuary and the family that has served Wichita for 100 years.

Read "Five Generations Strong" at [CommunityVoiceKS.com](http://CommunityVoiceKS.com).

After reading the story, come back and share your own tribute to the Jackson family

SCAN THE QR CODE  
To read "Five Generations Strong"



about Jackson Mortuary's remarkable history—from founder Abner B. Jackson Sr. through five generations of family leadership—read our 2023 feature, "**Five Generations Strong**," available at [CommunityVoiceKS.com](http://CommunityVoiceKS.com).

Some businesses measure success by the years they've been open.

Jackson Mortuary's legacy is measured in the lives they've touched.

Now it's our turn to tell that story.

**THE COMMUNITY VOICE**  
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# America's 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday

## Comes With Two Celebrations — And Plenty of Confusion



By Voice News Service

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday, many people are discovering there are actually two national organizations leading anniversary efforts — and that has created confusion.

The issue gained national attention after country music star Martina McBride and rocker Bret Michaels withdrew from a Washington, D.C., festival tied to Freedom 250, an organization created through an executive order by President Donald Trump. Both performers said they believed they had signed on for a nonpartisan celebration before learning of the event's connection to Freedom 250.

Their departures highlighted a question many Americans are asking: Why are there two groups celebrating the same milestone?

The answer lies in the existence of two separate organizations with similar patriotic branding and a shared goal of commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026.

The first, America250, was established by Congress in 2016. The bipartisan commission was created to coordinate the nation's semiquincentennial celebration and has spent nearly a decade developing educational programs, volunteer initiatives and anniversary events.

The second organization, Freedom 250, was created during

Trump's current term and promotes its own lineup of anniversary activities. Many of its events have been closely associated with the Trump administration, including the UFC Freedom 250 fight card held at the White House on June 14.

Freedom 250's largest upcoming event is the Great American State Fair, scheduled June 25 through July 10 on the National Mall. Organizers invited all 50 states and six U.S. territories to participate through exhibits highlighting each state's culture, tourism, agriculture and history.

Freedom 250 also is backing the Freedom 250 Grand Prix of Washington, D.C., scheduled for Aug. 23, a street race planned

around the National Mall as part of the anniversary celebration.

Freedom 250 describes itself as a nonpartisan nonprofit organization. Critics question whether it can be viewed as independent of Trump because it was created through a presidential executive order after Congress had already established America250. Supporters argue it simply offers another avenue for celebrating the nation's anniversary.

Despite the national attention, neither organization has developed a major public presence in Kansas or the Kansas City metropolitan area. A review of America250's event listings found only a handful of regional activities, including celebrations in Newton and



Liberty, Missouri.

For most Kansans, the nation's 250th birthday will likely be marked by local fireworks displays, parades, festivals and community gatherings organized independently of either national group.

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# Confused by the Supreme Court Amendment Commercials?

## Here's What They're Really About.

The “Vote Yes” and “Vote No” ads tell only part of the story. This guide explains what the constitutional amendment would actually change, why lawmakers proposed it and what's at stake for Kansas voters.

**By Bonita Gooch**  
The Community Voice

If you've been watching television lately, you've probably seen a steady stream of commercials urging you to vote “Yes” or “No” on the Kansas Supreme Court constitutional amendment.

The ads make the issue sound simple.

Supporters call it the “**Right to Vote Amendment**,” saying Kansans should have the right to elect Supreme Court justices.

Opponents counter that electing judges would open the door to political campaigns, special-interest money and outside influence over the state's highest court.

So what's the amendment really about?

The answer matters because the Kansas Supreme Court has made decisions that affect nearly every Kansan — from public school funding and abortion rights to business lawsuits, criminal appeals and how the Kansas Constitution is interpreted.

On **Aug. 4**, voters will decide whether to dramatically change how members of the state's highest court are selected.

Behind the television commercials lies one of the most significant proposed changes to Kansas government in decades.

### Why is This Amendment on the Ballot?

The debate didn't begin because anyone questioned whether current justices were

qualified.

It began after a series of Kansas Supreme Court decisions frustrated many Republican lawmakers.

Among the biggest were rulings requiring the Legislature to adequately fund public education and the 2019 decision declaring abortion is a constitutional right under the Kansas Constitution.

Legislative leaders have repeatedly criticized those rulings, arguing the court has become too powerful and no longer reflects the values of many Kansans. Attorney General Kris Kobach has also publicly identified changing how Supreme Court justices are selected as part of the path toward allowing Kansas to ban abortion.

In television commercials, supporters describe the amendment simply as giving Kansans the right to elect their Supreme Court justices.

However, opponents argue the amendment is really about reshaping the court after lawmakers were unable to achieve some policy goals through the existing judicial system.

### How Does the Current System Work?

Since 1958, Kansas has used what's known as the **Missouri Plan** to select members of the Kansas Supreme Court. The system was adopted after a political scandal involving judicial appointments convinced voters to move away from judicial elections.

When a vacancy occurs, a

**nine-member Supreme Court Nominating Commission** reviews applicants.

The commission consists of **five attorneys elected by lawyers and four non-lawyers appointed by the governor**, with one citizen member representing each of Kansas' four congressional districts.

Commission members review hundreds of pages of applications, writing samples, disciplinary records, references and judicial evaluations before interviewing candidates.

Former commission member Jay Fowler said commissioners are not trying to determine how someone might rule on abortion, taxes or any other issue. Instead, they're asking different questions:

- Does the candidate have integrity?
- Do they have good judgment?
- Can they separate personal opinions from the law?
- Do they have the temperament to treat everyone fairly?
- Can they clearly explain their decisions?

“We're looking for people who will fairly and impartially consider the facts, apply the law and explain how they reached that decision,” Fowler said.

The commission forwards three finalists to the governor, who appoints one.



Every six years, justices stand in a retention election where voters decide whether they should remain on the court.

### Why do Supporters Want to Change it?

Supporters argue the current system gives too much influence to lawyers and not enough to ordinary Kansans.

They question why attorneys select a majority of the nominating commission when no other profession has that level of influence over another branch of government.

They also argue Kansans should have the same right to elect Supreme Court justices that they have when choosing governors, legislators and many local judges.

### Opponents Say Judges Should Answer to the Law — Not Politics

Supporters of elections argue judges should be more accountable to voters, but opponents say that's not how judges are supposed to make decisions.

Former Kansas Supreme Court Justice Carol Beier said judges are supposed to base every decision on only three things: **the facts of the case, the law and the Constitution.**

Personal opinions, political beliefs, campaign promises and public pressure are not supposed to influence judicial decisions.

Opponents say campaigning for office introduces new

pressures judges were never intended to face. Instead of asking only, “What does the law require?” judges seeking election could also face pressure from campaign donors, political parties or public opinion.

### Can Elections Produce the Best Judges?

Opponents also argue statewide elections reward candidates who are the best campaigners, not necessarily the best judges.

Under the current system, members of the Supreme Court Nominating Commission spend months reviewing applications, writing samples, disciplinary records, judicial evaluations and references while interviewing candidates about ethics, judgment and judicial temperament.

A statewide election measures something very different: whether a candidate can raise money, build name recognition, communicate through advertising and win votes.

Beier pointed to Wisconsin's 2025 Supreme Court race, where more than **\$100 million** was spent on a single judicial election. She warned that similar races in Kansas could attract billionaires, corporations and national political organizations hoping to influence who serves on the state's highest court.

“If you're getting a million dollars from a billionaire or

**VOTE YES**



#### Supporters Say...

Supporters call the proposal the “Right to Vote Amendment.” They believe Kansans—not a commission of lawyers and citizens—should choose who serves on the state's highest court. They also argue the current system gives lawyers too much influence over judicial selection and that elections would make Supreme Court justices more accountable to the public.

#### Their message:

Greater voter control creates greater accountability.

**VOTE NO**



#### Opponents Say...

Opponents argue Supreme Court justices should be selected based on their legal qualifications—not their ability to campaign or raise money. They worry statewide elections could bring political parties, wealthy donors and special-interest groups into judicial races and make judges feel pressure beyond the facts, the law and the Constitution.

#### Their message:

Greater judicial independence protects courts from politics and special interests.

special-interest group,” former commission member Jay Fowler said, “it creates at least the appearance of potential bias.”

Former Wichita City Council member Brandon Johnson questioned whether even well-qualified judges could completely ignore the pressure that comes with millions of dollars in campaign spending.

### The Amendment Leaves Many Questions For Later

The constitutional amendment asks voters whether Kansas Supreme Court justices should be elected, but it says very little about **how** that election system would actually work.

Instead, many of the details would be left for the Legislature to decide after the amendment is approved.

The amendment does not specify whether Supreme Court elections would be

partisan or nonpartisan, how vacancies would be filled, how the state would transition from the current merit-selection system to elections, or when current justices would first have to stand for election. Those and other details would be determined later through legislation.

Former Justice Carol Beier said voters are being asked to approve the concept of electing Supreme Court justices while many of the rules governing that system have yet to be written. Opponents say that leaves voters without a complete picture of what the final system would look like.

### Are Retention Elections Enough?

Supporters of the amendment argue retention elections rarely provide meaningful accountability because many voters know little about the judges appearing on their ballots and

often skip those races.

Opponents acknowledge that criticism but note voters once had far more information available before retention elections.

Beier said Kansas previously funded a comprehensive judicial evaluation program that surveyed attorneys, jurors, court employees and others who interacted with judges. Those evaluations were published to help voters decide whether judges should be retained.

She said legislative funding for that program was later eliminated, making it more difficult for voters to learn about judges before casting their ballots.

### Why This Vote Matters

This amendment is about much more than how Kansas Supreme Court justices get their jobs.

The justices selected

under whichever system voters choose will decide future cases involving abortion rights, public school funding, constitutional rights, business disputes, criminal appeals and other issues that affect communities across Kansas.

Supporters say the amendment gives Kansans the right to elect their Supreme Court justices and makes the court more accountable to the public.

Opponents argue the current merit-selection system is more likely to identify highly qualified judges and protect them from the political and financial pressures that often accompany statewide elections.

Whichever system voters choose on Aug. 4 will shape not only how Kansas selects its Supreme Court justices, but also how future courts decide some of the state’s most important legal questions for years to come.



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## New Black Business Passport Highlights KC Entrepreneurs

Free guide features Black-owned restaurants, venues and businesses across the metro.

By Voice News Service

Kansas City residents looking to support Black-owned businesses now have a new resource in hand.

Kansas City G.I.F.T., a non-profit organization focused on building Black wealth and supporting Black entrepreneurship, has launched the Kansas City Black Business Passport, a free printed guide highlighting Black-owned restaurants, entertainment venues and businesses throughout the metro.

The pocket-sized guide features 15 Black-owned restaurants and 15 Black-owned arts and entertainment venues. A QR code inside the publication connects users to an expanded digital directory featuring more than 50 additional Black-owned

businesses across the Kansas City area.

The guide is designed to make it easier for residents and visitors to discover, support and spend money with Black-owned businesses.

“It is important for us to continue to identify innovative ways that we can drive support to Black-owned businesses in a way that fosters economic equity,” said Brandon Calloway, CEO and co-founder of Kansas City G.I.F.T. “As a community, it is up to us to actively create the world we want to see. This guide offers a clear and tangible way for people to take action to support local Black entrepreneurs.”

Kansas City G.I.F.T. — which stands for Generating Income For Tomorrow — was founded in 2020 with a mission of helping close the racial wealth

gap by creating and supporting sustainable Black-owned businesses and employers in Black communities. The organization provides funding opportunities, business development support and other resources for Black entrepreneurs throughout the region.

The Black Business Passport is available free of charge at the Kansas City G.I.F.T. Business Center, 5008 Prospect Ave., Kansas City, MO, and at several partner locations, including The Combine, Urban Restaurant, Equal Minded Cafe, The Bevel Barber Lounge, Fetch KC, Boulevard Brewing Co., Mildred’s South Plaza, Tiki Taco locations, Arvest Bank branches and the Prospect Business Association’s Union Station pop-up location.

Organizers hope the guide will encourage residents to



The free Kansas City Black Business Passport created by Kansas City G.I.F.T. showcases Black-owned restaurants, entertainment venues and businesses throughout the metro and connects users to dozens more through a digital directory.

intentionally support Black-owned businesses while exploring new restaurants, cultural destinations and entrepreneurs across the metro.

For more information, visit [KansasCityGift.org](http://KansasCityGift.org).

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M/WBE INVITATION TO BID

The Opus Group is soliciting bids for the Opus Congress Industrial project and encourages all Minority/Women Business Enterprise (M/WBE) firms to submit a bid.

The bid package opens:  
**Monday, July 6, 2026, and closes Monday, July 27, 2026.**

The project is located near NW 108 th Street and N Congress Avenue in Kansas City, MO. It includes two speculative warehouse buildings for a total of 710,000 square feet. The following scopes of work are available to bid. This includes, but is not limited to:

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Participation goals are 14.7% MBE and 14.4% WBE.

**To obtain access to the bid documents or submit a question, contact Kristin Flanery at [congress@opus-group.com](mailto:congress@opus-group.com) or (816) 480-4308. MWBE Outreach related questions, contact Consuella McCain at [operations@kccgrp.com](mailto:operations@kccgrp.com) or (913) 963-3815.**

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# VOICE Juneteenth Road Trip

**By Bonita Gooch**  
Editor In Chief

For the third straight year, The Community Voice hit the road to celebrate Juneteenth with communities across Kansas. Editor and Publisher Bonita Gooch spent three weeks traveling the state, meeting readers, making new connections and sharing in the unique celebrations that make

each community special. These pages feature highlights from Topeka, Lawrence, Kansas City, Kan., Kansas City, Mo., Wichita and Manhattan. But there's much more online, including additional photos and videos from these stops, plus video coverage from Leavenworth, Johnson County and Overland Park. Scan the QR code on this page to experience our complete Juneteenth Road Trip coverage. And yes—Bonita says she'll be back next year.

## Manhattan

Every year, Manhattan's Juneteenth Celebration keeps us hanging around long after we planned to leave. Party Train, formerly The Gap Band, had the crowd singing along to classic hits while families enjoyed great food, fellowship and one of the best community celebrations in Kansas.



## Topeka

From a parade and scholarship banquet to a community gathering at Hillcrest Park, Topeka residents celebrated Juneteenth with a full week of activities.



## More Locations

We also stopped by Leavenworth and two Johnson County Celebrations, one at Prairie Fire and the other at the Johnson County Heritage Center in Overland Park. There are videos from these locations online.

## Wichita Parade

The Community Voice's Juneteenth Road Trip began Sat., June 20 at Wichita's Juneteenth ICT Parade. Thousands turned out to enjoy perfect weather, community pride and a festive parade that ended with a celebration at McAdams Park.



## Wichita Gospel Night

Wichita Juneteenth wrapped up with an evening of gospel music, praise and fellowship. Featuring Maurette Brown Clark and local church choirs, the event left many attendees lingering long after the final song ended, enjoying the spirit of community that defined the week.



# Lawrence

Rain clouds couldn't dampen the spirit of Lawrence's Juneteenth celebration. Community members gathered in South Park for two days of food, music, activities and fellowship that reflected the city's welcoming and inclusive character.



# KCMO

We featured photos from the Kansas City Juneteenth Parade in our last issue, but that was only the beginning. The celebration continued Juneteenth weekend in the historic 18th & Vine District, where vendors, community organizations and thousands of visitors filled the streets. The festivities wrapped up Saturday night with a concert headlined by Common.

**SCAN THE QR CODE**  
to see parade and festival photos and videos



# Wyandotte County

A sudden downpour soaked the start of Kansas City, Kansas' Juneteenth parade, but many participants and spectators refused to let the weather end the celebration. Later, community members gathered at Memorial Hall for an evening of music featuring LeVelle, John Hudson, Bri Davis and the J Foster Band.



# Gathering of Pearls Foundation Awards \$36,000 in Scholarships to 31 Kansas City Students

Annual "Made for Success" brunch celebrates student achievement while investing in the next generation of college leaders.

## By Voice News Service

Thirty-one Kansas City-area students are heading into the next school year with

one less financial burden after the Gathering of Pearls Foundation awarded \$36,000 in scholarships during its fifth annual Made for Success

Scholarship Brunch.

Held under the theme "Be the Legacy," the annual fundraiser celebrated students pursuing higher education while highlighting the foundation's mission of helping remove financial barriers to college for deserving young people across the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Scholarships were awarded through the foundation's Fresh Start program, which supports incoming college freshmen and sophomores, and the Finish Strong program, which assists students completing their junior and senior years. Several recipients have received support from the foundation throughout multiple years of their college careers, and many are attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Founded in 2020 by Southern University and LSU alumna Dr. Donna Leah Houpe, the Gathering of Pearls Foundation was created to expand educational opportunities for students who demonstrate academic achievement, community involvement and leadership potential.



Scholarship recipients gather with founders, donors and supporters during the Gathering of Pearls Foundation's fifth annual Made for Success Scholarship Brunch, where the organization awarded \$36,000 in scholarships to 31 Kansas City-area students. *ERIC ALFREDO HUGHEY*

The foundation also recognized four educators whose dedication to students and the community has left a lasting impact. Jonathan Houpe, Nicolle Jones, Michelle Dickerson and Billee Runnels-Potts received the Hilda Rodrigue Impact Award, named in honor of Houpe's late mother, whose commitment to education and service helped inspire the foundation's mission.

Support from community partners and donors continues to fuel the organization's growth. This

year's event received assistance from the Kansas City, Missouri Neighborhood Tourist Development Fund, 5th District At-Large Councilmember Darrell Curls, Holy Rosary Credit Union and the Alpha Delta Kappa Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, which donated \$3,100 in gift cards to scholarship recipients.

Since its founding, the Gathering of Pearls Foundation has awarded more than \$175,000 in scholarships to 64 students

throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area while honoring 14 educators through the Hilda Rodrigue Impact Award. Foundation leaders hope to increase annual scholarship awards to \$50,000 by 2027 as they continue investing in students and strengthening educational opportunities across the region.

More information about the Gathering of Pearls Foundation, scholarship opportunities and ways to support its mission is available at [GOPFND.org](http://GOPFND.org).

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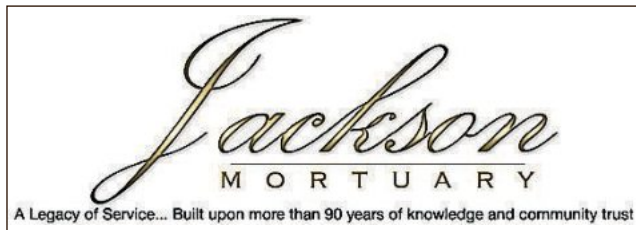
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**Billie Rucker, 72**  
 Aug 21, 1953 — Jun 14, 2026  
 Service was held June 24 at Jackson Mortuary

**Anthony Jackson, 29**  
 Sep 14, 1996 — Jun 14, 2026  
 Service was held June 19 at Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Jerusalem

**Isis T. Laudermilk, 25**  
 Aug 30, 2000 — Jun 13, 2026

**Leo Rogers, 88**  
 Jan 3, 1938 — Jun 15, 2026  
 Service was held on June 27 at Holy Savior Catholic Church

**Jeff A. Murdock, 55**  
 Aug 7, 1970 — Jun 14, 2026  
 Service will be held at 11 am on July 2 at Holy Savior Catholic Church, 3000 E 13th

Service will be held at 11 a.m. on June 25 at Jackson Mortuary located at 1125 E 13th

**Lonnie Henry Fields, 93**  
 Dec 23, 1932 — Jun 10, 2026  
 Service was held June 26 at St. James Missionary Baptist Church

**Barbara Marks Lorance, 83**  
 August 10, 1942 — June 6, 2026  
 Service was held June 19 at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church

## TARP Reunion Returns After Four-Year Hiatus, Bringing Old Friends Back Together

For generations of Black Wichitans, TARP wasn't just a dance. It was where friendships were made, memories were created and Friday nights belonged.

After a four-year hiatus, the annual TARP Reunion returns **Saturday, July 4**, bringing former Teen Age Recreation Program participants back to the Carl Brewer Community Center at McAdams Park.

The reunion, held from **6:30 to 9 p.m.**, marks the first gathering since 2022. Organizers were forced to pause the event while the community center underwent renovations.

Founded in 1955 at McAdams Park, the Teen Age Recreation Program gave Black teenagers a safe place to gather, dance and socialize at a time when opportunities were limited elsewhere in Wichita. For nearly two decades, the Friday night dances became a rite of passage for generations of local youth.

That tradition continues this year, although organizers have adjusted the schedule to allow individuals who want to attend Wichita's Independence Day fireworks display.

The reunion promises exactly what longtime attendees remember — music, food and fellowship.

Admission is **just \$5**, and organizers are also offering \$5 meal plates featuring a choice of a hot link or pulled pork slider, baked beans, potato salad, dessert and a drink.

Those are old-school prices for an old-school reunion.

Organizers encourage attendees to wear TARP T-shirts from previous reunions and come ready to reminisce about an era when McAdams Park was the center of Black teen social life in Wichita.

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**2026 | WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Tour Tuesdays**

Wichita Public Schools will host Tour Tuesdays to highlight needs and share information about the bond issue on the November 3, 2026 ballot.

All Open Houses will be held 4:30-5:30 p.m.

RSVPs are encouraged to allow us to accommodate all who are interested.

To RSVP for an open house, go to [wpsbond.org/community-involvement](https://wpsbond.org/community-involvement).

- June 30 - Coleman Environmental Magnet Middle School, 1544 N. Gouverneur
- July 7 - Black Traditional Magnet Elementary School, 1045 High St.
- July 14 - Northwest High School, 1220 N. Tyler
- July 21 - Adams Elementary School, 1002 N. Oliver
- July 28 - Irving Elementary, 1642 N. Market
- August 4 - Future Ready Manufacturing Center at North High School, 1435 N. Waco

**ENROLLMENT**

**Online:** starting Tuesday, July 7  
*Kindergarten must enroll in-person*

**In-person:** 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. July 27-28, 2026  
*at any WPS school*

**Multilingual:** 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. July 9, 2026  
*Alvin E. Morris Admin. Center  
 903 S. Edgemoor*

**BOE Meeting**

Monday, July 20, 2026  
 6:00 p.m.

Alvin E Morris Admin Center  
 903 S. Edgemoor

Learn more at [usd259.org/boe](https://usd259.org/boe)

# 116 Years Later, Saint Mark Still Building Community

Month-long anniversary celebration honors the church's legacy while focusing on future generations and service beyond its walls.

By Ty Davis  
and Bonita Gooch  
The Community Voice

For many members, Saint Mark United Methodist Church is more than a place of worship.

It is where friendships are formed, young people are mentored, leaders are developed and community is strengthened.

As the church prepares to celebrate its 116th anniversary throughout July, those connections — built over generations of ministry and service in Wichita — are at the heart of the month-long observance.

“We don’t believe that an anniversary is just to look back,” said Rev. Dr. Victor T. McCullough, senior pastor of Saint Mark. “It is a look back in order to look forward.”

Located at 1525 N. Lorraine Ave., Saint Mark has served Wichita through changing generations, economic challenges and social change. This year’s anniversary theme, “Harambee,” a Swahili word meaning “pull together,” reflects the congregation’s emphasis on unity, collective action and shared responsibility.

For many members, it’s that sense of community that



(L-R) Associate Pastor Marsha Haney, Rev. Dr. Victor McCullough and First Lady Nancy McCullough

makes Saint Mark special.

Sheryl R. Wilson said she and her family first connected with Saint Mark during the COVID-19 pandemic by watching online services and participating in prayer gatherings. When they eventually visited in person, they found a church home.

“The linchpin for me was the sense of community,” Wilson said. “There were so many people from different walks of life who are part of this church, and they do amazing things all around.”

For church member Michael Webber, the church’s role extends beyond Sunday worship.

“My concern is that the

church remains relevant,” Webber said. “The church can still be a leader.”

Throughout its history, Saint Mark has encouraged members to become leaders in their neighborhoods, professions and civic life.

McCullough also points to the church’s long-standing commitment to advocacy and service.

“This congregation has always been willing to make waves on behalf of those who are in need,” McCullough said. “Our greatest resource is believing in the power of God to get things done.”

That commitment continues through ministries and outreach programs, including On the Mark, the church’s nonprofit organization focused on mental health support, education, youth development, economic empowerment and financial literacy.

Church leaders say investing in young people remains one of their highest priorities.

The congregation regularly involves youth in worship and leadership opportunities, and for nearly a quarter-century the church’s Seeds of



Life program has served children and families throughout the community.

“We don’t want our kids to just survive,” Wilson said. “We want them to thrive.”

That focus on future generations will be front and center during the anniversary celebration.

The month-long observance begins July 5 with a Faith, Family and Fellowship service celebrating God’s faithfulness throughout the church’s history.

On July 12, the theme shifts to “From Foundation to the Future,” highlighting youth leadership. Young people will participate throughout the service through music, dance, scripture and prayer. Guest preacher Pastor Kristen Gunter of Rock Fellowship Church will deliver the message.

The celebration continues July 19 with Community Partners Sunday and Harambee on the Hill. Following the 10 a.m. worship service, the community is invited back at 2 p.m. for



an afternoon of fellowship, performances and connections with local organizations and resources.

The anniversary concludes July 26 with a Celebration of Resilience featuring guest preacher Pastor Cameron Martin of Saint Mark Cathedral Church of God in Christ in New York. The service will include a “Suits and Sneakers” theme as members celebrate both the church’s history and its future.

For McCullough, the church’s mission remains as clear today as it was generations ago: welcoming people,

“There were so many people from different walks of life who are part of this church, and they do amazing things all around.”

SHERYL WILSON

strengthening faith and helping individuals use their gifts to make a difference.

More than a century after its founding, Saint Mark continues to serve as a place where people find faith, friendship and purpose. And as the church prepares to celebrate 116 years, its leaders hope the values that carried it this far will continue to guide the next generation.

“We welcome all people, strengthen people in the faith and grow fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ for Kingdom impact,” McCullough said.



# VIBRANT VOICES

A Special Publication for Seniors



Bobbie Lee didn't begin playing tennis until she was nearly 50. Now, as she approaches her 70th birthday, she says she's in some of the best health of her life. Researchers say today's seniors are staying healthier and more active longer than previous generations, and Lee credits tennis with helping keep her physically fit, mentally challenged and socially connected. (COURTESY PHOTO)

## 70 Isn't What It Used to Be

Research shows today's older adults are staying healthier, more active and mentally sharper than previous generations—and Wichita's Bobbie and Alex Lee are living proof.

By Bonita Gooch  
Editor-in-Chief

If you watched Bobbie Lee sprint across a tennis court chasing down a shot, you probably wouldn't guess she'll turn 70 later this year.

Lee has been playing tennis for about 20 years, and today she says she's in some of the best health of her life. Aside from taking a low-dose medication for high blood pressure, she doesn't take any other prescribed medications, stays socially active and spends much of her free time working to improve her game.

"I never imagined this is what my life would look like at 70," Lee said.

Her parents' retirement looked very different.

"My parents mostly stayed home," she said. "That's just what people did."

Today, many older adults are doing just the opposite—and research shows it may be one of the reasons they're aging more slowly than previous generations.

Scientists say today's seniors aren't just living longer; they're living healthier. Studies from around the world show many people in their 70s and even 80s have better physical and mental abilities than people of the same age just 30 years ago.

One of the most comprehensive studies comes from Finland, where researchers compared adults ages 75 and 80 who were tested between 1989 and 1990 with people the same age tested nearly three decades later using the exact same methods.

The newer generation consistently performed better.

Researchers found they walked faster, had stronger grip strength and stronger

leg muscles, reacted more quickly and scored higher on tests measuring memory, reasoning and verbal fluency. In short, today's older adults entered their later years stronger and sharper than those who came before them.

Researchers believe the improvements are the result of several lifelong advantages, including better nutrition, increased physical activity, advances in health care, improved education, healthier workplaces and better overall living conditions.

The findings challenge the old idea that growing older automatically means slowing down.

Researchers say the difference between **chronological age**—the number of birthdays you've celebrated—and **biological age**—how well your body is actually functioning—has become increasingly important. Two people who are both 70 years old can have dramatically different levels of health depending on how they've lived.

Lee appears to be a good example.

She says tennis gives her far more than exercise. It gives her a reason to improve, friends to spend time with, goals to pursue and the motivation to stay in shape so she can continue competing.

"I love the competition," she said.

Whether it's learning a new strategy, improving a shot or preparing for the next match, the game continually challenges her both physically and mentally.

Experts say that's exactly the kind of lifestyle that helps people age well.

Regular physical activity helps preserve muscle strength, balance and mobility.

“

I never imagined this is what my life would look like at 70.”

BOBBIE LEE

Learning new skills and solving problems keeps the brain engaged, while friendships built around hobbies and activities reduce social isolation—another important factor linked to healthy aging.

Her husband, Alex Lee, 72, shares that passion. A top-level amateur player, he coaches the Friends University men's tennis team and serves on the United States Tennis Association's Missouri Valley Region board. Together, the couple has built a lifestyle centered around movement, learning and community.

Researchers say those three ingredients consistently appear in studies of healthy aging.

Modern medicine has also changed what growing older looks like. Today's seniors benefit from better treatments for high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, along with joint replacements, cataract surgery, improved hearing aids and medications that help people remain active longer.

Just as important, scientists have learned the brain continues to adapt throughout life. A concept known as neuroplasticity shows that older adults can continue learning new skills, forming new memories and strengthening brain connections well into their later years.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is that many studies find older adults become happier with age.

Social psychologist Katharine Esty, who interviewed more than 150 people in their 70s, 80s and 90s, found many reported greater contentment despite the challenges of aging. They focused less on careers and possessions and more on relationships, gratitude and enjoying everyday moments.

Researchers sometimes call this the “paradox of aging.” Even as some physical abilities decline, emotional well-being often improves.

Lee sees another difference.

Among her six surviving siblings, she is the only one who remains highly active. Most of the others struggle with health problems.

She doesn't claim tennis is a cure-all.

But she believes staying active—and having something she genuinely enjoys doing—has made a tremendous difference.

Researchers agree.

Their message isn't that everyone should become a competitive tennis player. It's that successful aging often starts with having a reason to stay engaged.

Whether it's tennis, pickleball, dancing, gardening, volunteering, walking with friends or learning something new, experts say finding an activity that keeps both the body and mind moving may be one of the best investments people can make in their future health.

Growing older, they say, doesn't have to mean giving up the things you love.

For many Americans, it increasingly means having more healthy years in which to enjoy them.

## Tech Tip of the Month

Stop Searching. Start Asking.

For years, most of us searched the internet by typing just a few words:

- Medicare Part D
- tomato plants
- Wichita weather

Today, you'll usually get better results by asking a complete question—just as if you were talking to another person.

Instead of typing a few keywords, try asking:

- **What's the difference between Medicare Part A, Part B and Part D?**
- **Why are the leaves on my tomato plants turning yellow?**
- **What's the weather forecast for Wichita this weekend, and when is the best time to mow my lawn?**

- **How do I make the text larger on my smartphone?**
- **What are three easy, healthy dinners I can make with chicken and rice?**

Many search engines now use artificial intelligence to answer questions in plain language before showing links to websites where you can learn more.

The key is to be specific. The more details you include in your question, the more helpful the answer is likely to be.

**Give it a try:** The next time you're looking for information online, don't just search with a couple of words. Ask the exact question you want answered.

# Technology That's Actually Worth Learning After 65

Forget the gadgets. These are the digital tools that can save you time, money and frustration every day.

### By Voice News Service

If you've ever looked at a new piece of technology and thought, "I don't need that," you're not alone.

For years, new technology seemed to be designed for younger people. Every new phone came with more buttons, more apps and more features to learn. Many older adults decided it just wasn't worth the hassle.

But something has changed.

Today's most useful

technology isn't about keeping up with trends. It's about making everyday life easier. Whether it's staying in touch with family, avoiding scams, finding your way around town or getting quick answers to questions, many of today's digital tools are designed to simplify life—not complicate it.

You don't have to become a technology expert. In fact, you probably already own the most important device you'll need: your smartphone.

Here are five technologies that are worth getting to know.

### Artificial Intelligence: Your New Personal Assistant

Artificial intelligence, or AI, may be the biggest

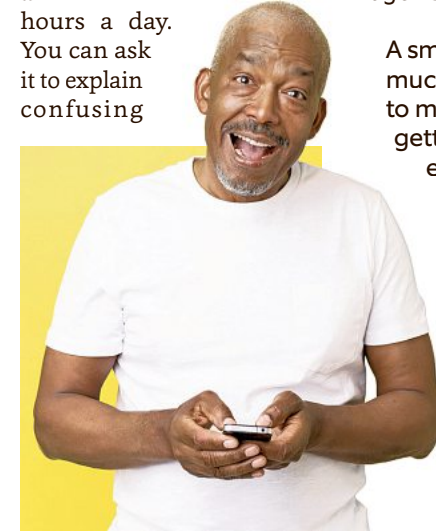
technology breakthrough in decades, but don't let the name intimidate you.

Think of AI as a personal assistant that's available 24 hours a day. You can ask it to explain confusing

medical terms, help write a letter, suggest recipes using ingredients you already have

See **TECHNOLOGY** Page 15 →

A smartphone can be much more than a way to make calls. From getting answers to everyday questions to staying connected with family and managing appointments, today's technology offers practical tools that can make life easier at any age.



## Care doesn't have to wait for open enrollment



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*Participants must be at least 55 years old and live in Sedgwick County. All PACE participants agree to receive all services other than emergency services from HOPE staff and its network of providers, and may be fully and personally liable for the costs of unauthorized or out-of-network services.*



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- Social work/care management and home health included
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- Day center and activities
- A personalized plan to help you with your symptoms and to help you reach your goals

 Ascension Living

**HOPE**

**TECHNOLOGY,**  
from Page 14 ↓

or even plan a vacation. It doesn't replace doctors, lawyers or financial advisors, but it can save time and make everyday tasks easier.

**Voice Assistants: Let Your Phone Do the Work**

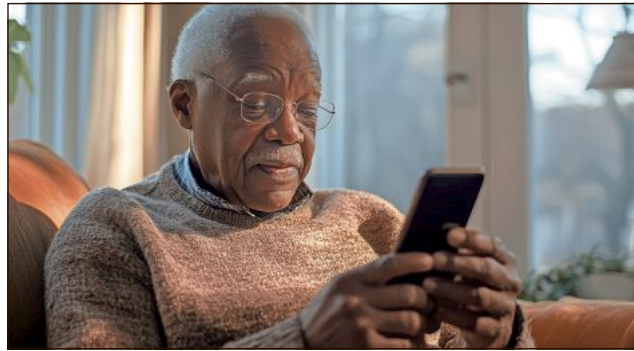
Did you know you don't have to type everything?

Most smartphones let you simply speak your request. You can ask your phone to set a reminder, call a family member, send a text, play your favorite music or tell you tomorrow's weather.

If arthritis or vision problems make typing difficult, voice commands can be a game changer.

**Video Calls: Bringing Family Closer**

Whether your grandchildren live across town or across the country, video calling lets you see their faces instead of just hearing their voices.



Programs like FaceTime, Zoom and Google Meet have made it easier than ever to celebrate birthdays, attend family gatherings or simply check in with loved ones without leaving home.

**Your Phone Can Help Protect You**

Scammers are becoming more sophisticated, but smartphones are getting smarter, too.

Many phones can identify suspected spam calls, filter suspicious text messages and alert you when a website may not be safe. Learning to use

these features can add another layer of protection against fraud.

**Health Tools in Your Pocket**

Your smartphone can also help you stay healthy.

Many people use it to keep track of medications, remind them about doctor's appointments, monitor their daily steps or even detect a fall and automatically contact emergency services.

You don't have to use every feature. Even one or two can make life a little easier.

**You Don't Have to Learn It All at Once**

The biggest mistake many people make is thinking they have to master technology overnight.

You don't. Learning one new feature each month can make a surprising difference over the course of a year. The goal isn't to become a technology expert. It's to discover tools that help you spend less time struggling with devices and more time enjoying life.

# Brunch, Bingo, Boogie

One of the popular events during Wichita's Juneteenth ICT celebration, Brunch, Bingo and Boogie brought seniors together for brunch, dancing and bingo. The event highlighted the importance of staying active while creating opportunities for fellowship and community connection.





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