

# ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

JANUARY 24, 2012

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the annual State of the City Address and thank you for your attendance today. It is hard to believe that this is the tenth anniversary of presenting to you a summary of the past year in review. What is not hard to believe, though, is that 2011 proved to be another remarkable year in many ways for the City of Leawood and its business community and citizens.

However, before I begin, I also want to thank the corporate sponsors for this event. Your contributions are very much appreciated and further enable the Leawood Chamber of Commerce to excel in their service to our community.

Special thanks to the Chamber Board of Directors, Chamber President and CEO Kevin Jeffries and his terrific team. If you were present at the Chamber's annual luncheon meeting last month, you learned that there were 22 ribbon cuttings performed during 2011--an all-time record!

Although the Leawood City Council has already been recognized, I want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to serve the citizens of Leawood with such an outstanding group of public servants. Their willingness and strong desire to make Leawood the best city in the metropolitan area is evident at every City Council meeting.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Leawood City Administrator Scott Lambers, Department Directors and all of the professional staff in attendance today for all of the hard work they performed in 2011. Would they all please stand, and would you join me in giving them a well-deserved round of applause.

I might be a bit biased, however, I believe that the Leawood Chamber of Commerce is the best in the metropolitan region and ensures that the Leawood business community remains an engaged and integral part of the City's high quality of life.

If you are wondering how high, according to the *Kansas City Business Journal* report regarding quality of life titled "On Numbers," the City of Leawood ranked near the top and was the highest ranked city of the six cities rated in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Out of the nearly 1,000 Midwest cities with populations in excess of 10,000 that were evaluated for offering the best quality of life, Leawood was rated 7<sup>th</sup>. Our motto and intention of “Growing with Distinction” is being recognized.

The analysis used, and I quote, “a 20-part formula to find Midwestern communities that enjoy healthy economies, light traffic, moderate costs of living, impressive housing stocks and strong educational systems.” No other city in the metro region was ranked in the top 50!

This remarkable achievement is clearly due to the collaboration and cooperation between the City of Leawood, the Leawood Chamber, the business community, our outstanding school districts and our citizens.

Now, as they say in Hollywood, on with the show...

Yes, I am referring to AMC.

The City Council and I were delighted when Gerry Lopez, President and CEO of AMC Theatres, announced on September 14<sup>th</sup> that AMC would remain in the metropolitan area and would be relocating its world headquarters to Leawood at Park Place. Initially founded in 1920 in Kansas City as Durwood Theatres, AMC now boasts being the Country’s second largest theatrical exhibition business with over 350 theatres and encompassing more than 5,000 screens in the United States, Canada, France, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

AMC intends to build an “iconic” office structure that reflects the prominence of their position in the entertainment industry. The 160,000 square foot building, to be located at the southeast corner of Nall Avenue and Town Center Drive, will be the new home for AMC’s 450 associates and contractors. According to Mr. Lopez, AMC considered re- location options in New York and Los Angeles; but in the final analysis, decided that the Kansas City metropolitan area was and should remain their base of operations.

While the announcement by AMC to locate in Leawood was one of the top news stories of the metropolitan area in 2011, there were several additional Class-A office, retail and restaurant establishments that have or will soon join the growing number of businesses who had previously selected Park Place as their location for business during this past year.

These include: Generali USA Life Reassurance Company; Muller Bressler Brown, a Kansas City-based advertising agency; the law firm of Douthit Frets Rouse Gentile & Rhodes; Tallulahbelle’s; 801 Chophouse; Mestizo Mexican Restaurant operated by renowned Food Network Chef Aaron Sanchez; EJ’s Boutique; Bar Method; Gordon Biersch Brewery Restaurant; and Picasso Exotic Aquatics.

The City's other shopping centers all announced new tenants in 2011 as well.

Across the street from Park Place at Town Center Plaza, Express clothier for men and women and Madewell opened this past year along with Seduzione Leggs and 3D House Boutique. Anthropologie also became a new addition this past summer.

At One Nineteen, in one of the most anticipated openings of a grocery store in the City's history, Trader Joe's unlocked their doors to a long line of anxious, dedicated shoppers this past July. I can personally attest that parking spaces in front of the store are at a premium at any time of the day. In fact, a *Kansas City Star* reporter wanting to do a story on the store had to visit three times before she could find a parking space.

As part of the opening celebration, City Administrator Scott Lambers got into the swing of things by wearing a Hawaiian shirt and hat and one of the leis the employees handed out. Perhaps it was too much, because once inside the store he was frequently approached by customers asking for locations of the store products, of which, like them, he did not have a clue.

Other new arrivals at One Nineteen include: Treats Unleashed for all of your four-legged family members; Le Creuset Signature Store; Flirt Boutique; Glace Artisan Ice Cream; Hot Mama; Standard Style; Baldwin Denim; Fo Thai Restaurant; Vako Jewels; Lululemon Athletica; and women's clothier Love Culture.

To the north of One Nineteen, the Camelot Court Shopping Center will be the newest location for the City's second barbeque restaurant. Oklahoma Joe's will be located in the former TGI Friday's building. Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches also opened last year as well as Jasmine Pan Asian restaurant in the former Golden Leaf location.

At Ironhorse Center on 151<sup>st</sup> Street, Paddy O'Quigley's opened last May in the former Blue Moose site.

Directly north at Nall Valley Shops, Southern Blu Style Boutique and Banana Island Frozen Yogurt Paradise opened this past summer.

Along 135<sup>th</sup> Street at Parkway Plaza, Wow's Floral & Hardscape; Marquette Physical Therapy; Jazzercise; and Addie Rose Boutique arrived this past year along with Runways and Kosama Complete Body Transformation.

Further west along 135<sup>th</sup> Street at the Cornerstone Shopping Center, Talk of the Town Grill and Bar opened in the former Ted's Montana Grill building.

At 135<sup>th</sup> and Mission Road at the Market Square Shopping Center, China King is a new tenant as well as Life Spring Med Spa.

At Mission Farms on 105<sup>th</sup> Street and Mission Road, Boutique Chic is now open. Following their opening, Lakeside Tavern arrived. Although not new to Mission Farms, Room 39 was recognized for its consistent level of excellence by being named one of the top 100 restaurants in the Country by the restaurant rating service, *OpenTable*.

Up north, at the Ranchmart Shopping Center, Sarpino's Pizzeria opened last April. It was followed by We B Nuts and Stuff offering nuts, dried fruits and specialty candy.

Each year I am amazed by the number and array of new restaurants that set their sights on Leawood to serve the culinary desires of our broad community. A Leawood Shopping and Dining Destination Brochure has become quite extensive in recent years.

Other 2011 business news for Leawood included SFP, Specialty Fertilizer Products, located at Park Place, receiving the "Mr. K" award and the "Small Business of the Year" award from the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. These honors were in recognition of the company's success in developing innovative technologies for its clients throughout the world.

Ascend Learning, a health-care educational company, announced it will be consolidating its offices and moving to Two Hallbrook Place this spring. The firm also announced that it anticipates increasing its number of employees from 250 to 325.

Reece & Nichols built its new 30,000 square foot headquarters building at 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Roe Avenue. The company also built a new 13,000 square foot retail building at 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Briar at the Parkway Plaza Center.

While the arrival of new businesses is important to the City of Leawood, retention and, when possible, expansion of existing businesses is also crucial. Last year, Mariner Holdings, LLC, announced that it will not only remain headquartered in Leawood but will also expand its operations.

In addition, Discover Vision Centers relocated two Leawood offices into the former Reece & Nichols Building on Roe Avenue.

Similar to the private sector, the City of Leawood also enjoyed a productive 2011.

To begin, first and foremost, unlike the Federal Government, the City retained its AAA bond rating, continuing to ensure the Leawood business community and its residents that the City remains a solid investment opportunity for the Nation's capital markets.

The City also maintained the second lowest property tax mill levy amongst all of the cities of the first class in the State of Kansas.

The City's sales tax was reduced by the voter-approved four tenths of a percent since the \$10 million dollar threshold was reached for the construction of the City's new Justice Center. Those dollars have been augmented by additional funds planned for this purpose. This facility is slated to break ground later this year. I am proud to report that our Justice Center will be constructed without issuance of bonds and free from debt-financing.

In another major public improvement endeavor, the Governing Body has reached consensus to initiate a \$20 million dollar curb and gutter replacement program over a four-year period starting in 2013. The reason for this rehabilitation program is due to undetected faulty base material that was contained in the concrete installed, not only in Leawood, but also throughout the metropolitan area between 1983 and 1999. The City will need to debt-finance this program, and it may require a property mill levy increase.

I used the term "may require" because that potential mill levy increase is based upon current conservative projections contained in the City's financial model. In recent years, the City has benefited from receiving more revenue and spending less than is forecasted by the model. Given the likelihood of this trend continuing, it is quite possible that the projected mill levy increases will be deferred, reduced or possibly eliminated.

The City achieved some noteworthy accomplishments as part of its efforts to become more sustainable. Leawood received a Tree City USA "Growth Award" as well as once again being named a Tree City USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation for its commitment to urban forestry. Due to the efforts of the City's Sustainability Advisory Board and its citizen volunteers led by Councilmembers Debra Filla and Julie Cain, Leawood received the "Governmental Environmental Excellence" award from Bridging the Gap, a regional organization promoting sustainable practices by the public and private sectors of the Kansas City area. The City was also recognized as an "Honorable Mention Bicycle Friendly Community" from the League of American Bicyclists.

Demonstrating the persistence of the Leawood Police Department, a Kansas City man pleaded guilty to second degree murder for his role in the City's first homicide that occurred over 30 years ago. This leaves only one unsolved murder of the three that have occurred in the City's 63-year history, which is an average of one homicide every 21 years, making Leawood one of the safest communities in the country.

In a first for the City, Leawood's Ironhorse Golf Course was selected by *Golf World* to be one of the top 100 golf shops in the Country. Our appreciation goes to Troon Golf and the Ironhorse Golf Course Advisory Board chaired by Dick Fuller for this prestigious accomplishment.

In recognition for his 15 years of support and fundraising for the Special Olympics through the Law Enforcement Torch Run, Master Police Officer Shawn Farris received the John Carion "Unsung Hero" award at the 2011 International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conference for Special Olympics. This honor is bestowed to only a few individuals worldwide each year. Congratulations, Shawn.

Moving from Shawn to Dawn, former Assistant Finance Director Dawn Long was named Finance Director for the City of Leawood. Dawn, congratulations to you as well.

As I noted earlier, the City's number 7 rating was due in a large part to the quality of life amenities Leawood has to offer. One of the most important is our Parks and Trails System.

Last year, I-Lan Park, dedicated to our sister city, I-Lan, Taiwan, became the location for the City's latest piece of public art. "Cloud Gate" by Jessie Small is a wonderful addition to the City's impressive collection. My thanks to Arts Council Chairman Mary Tearney, Art in Public Places Initiative Chairman Dr. Ann Kenney and their citizen volunteers for all of their outstanding work on behalf of our community.

Gezer Park was the beneficiary of several improvements, including some public/private partnership enhancements. There have been a number of generous donors to this initiative.

Mentioning some of the primary gifts, there was the addition of a Children's Play Area funded in part by the Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust; the Havdalah Garden funded by Roshann Parris and Jeff Dobbs; and the Ceremonial Fire Pit and seating area funded by Al and Barbara Beitchman, Harvey Bodker, Alan Edelman and Dr. Debbie Sosland-Edelman. My sincere thanks to Leawood Foundation Chairman Alice Hawk and the Foundation Board for all of their hard work on this endeavor.

As you are probably aware, Gezer Park is a tribute to our sister city relationship with the Gezer Region of Israel. This past October, a delegation of Governing Body Members and some of their spouses traveled to the Gezer Region for the Leawood Square and Leawood Trail Dedication.

Signage along the Trail depicts the Gezer Regional offices located within 220 feet, while the City of Leawood is shown to be 6,887 miles away. Although the trip was of short duration, it was packed with activities and further reinforced the bonds we have shared together since the relationship was established in 2003.

2011 saw a major expansion to Ironwoods Park. The Park, now almost 120 acres, extends all the way between Mission Road and Kenneth Road due to the Governing Body's decision to acquire almost 50 additional acres of meadows and rolling, tree-filled property. The City intends to evaluate the potential uses of this newly-acquired acreage by having citizen meetings and involving the City's Park and Recreation Advisory Board, Planning Commission and the Governing Body.

Another quality of life amenity the City offers to its citizens is the wide array of leisure activities that are made available for individuals of all ages.

This past year, nearly 15,000 people enjoyed a variety of events including the Leawood Stage Company's production, chaired by Paul Anderson, of *Bye, Bye Birdie*; the City's Movie Nights; Breakfast with Santa; Daddy-Daughter Date Night; Grinnin & Grovin Kids Series; Fourth of July fireworks and festivities; and the ever-popular Doggie Dunk--to name just a few. The City's Park & Recreation staff continues to add, improve and carefully evaluate the City's leisure programs to ensure that Leawood residents are able to enjoy life to its fullest right in their own back yard.

In a recent *USA Today* article jointly written by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Robert Graham, it was noted that of the 11 states with the highest rates of volunteerism, one of which was Kansas, these states experienced the smallest rates of unemployment during the past recession. Conversely, seven of the 10 states with the lowest numbers of volunteers suffered the highest increases in unemployment rates.

This striking inverse relationship is believed to be due to the fact that participating in community service not only provides inherent individual satisfaction and higher self-esteem, but it also increases the opportunities for finding a job by demonstrating a commitment to civic engagement and building personal networks that would otherwise not exist.

It makes me proud to note that our professional staff takes very seriously the attitude of service to our citizenry. Similarly, they are engaged in a multitude of philanthropic initiatives throughout the year. Leawood is also most fortunate to benefit from resident volunteers who serve on councils, commissions, advisory boards and committees. Would all of those volunteers here today please stand and be recognized for your countless efforts!

To see that Kansas is in the top tier of volunteerism nationwide may be a bit of new information to some, but it would not surprise me at all to find that the citizens of Leawood are in the top tier of Kansas.

Each year I take great pleasure in recognizing a few noteworthy achievements of some residents in our community. While there are certainly personal rewards in being a citizen volunteer, I am positive that such rewards are an afterthought to the benefit being provided to the community. I also continue to be amazed at the quality and variety of awards our residents receive.

As I read the names of the following individuals, would those that were able to join us today please stand at your table and remain standing until all have been recognized.

While many singing careers are short-lived, Sarah McMullen, a sophomore at Blue Valley North, has already demonstrated that she will have a long-term impact on the music industry. Sarah first demonstrated the quality of her singing talents in middle school when she won Radio Disney's Regional Hannah Montana Talent Competition two years in a row. Sarah went on to expand her endeavors to include dancing and song writing. This past year, Sarah was voted pop artist of 2010 at the 20<sup>th</sup> annual Los Angeles Music Awards. Sarah, as a former piano teacher, you have no idea how much pleasure it gives me to have young people like yourself bring the joy of music into other people's lives.

The mission of the Jackson County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) is to provide legal-advocacy assistance to abused and neglected youth who are in the Jackson County Court System. CASA relies heavily on volunteers to successfully carry out its functions. In recognition of their importance to the organization, each year CASA presents its "Light of Hope" award to deserving individuals. In 2011, Leawood Councilmember Gary Bussing and his wife Kathy were the recipients of this prestigious award for their many years of service to CASA.

For the past 125 years, the Salvation Army has been a major resource for helping people in need. Leawood resident Tom Bash, a former Board Chairman and current Emeritus Board Member of the Salvation Army's Metropolitan Advisory Board, was presented with the "Others Award" at the Salvation Army's Annual Civic Luncheon in recognition of his long-term commitment to give extraordinary service to others by his efforts through the Salvation Army.

Each year, United Community Services of Johnson County recognizes individuals who strive to improve the health, social and economic conditions in Johnson County. This past year, Fred Logan received the United Community Services "Citizen of the Year" award for his tireless efforts to champion the causes of public education. In addition, Fred was recently named to the Kansas Board of Regents by Governor Sam Brownback.

Former "Johnson Countian of the Year" Bob Regnier was named the 2011 "Kansas Citian of the Year" by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Bob received the Chamber's highest recognition for his efforts to promote the entire Kansas City area and to encourage businesses and individuals to work past the divisions created by the state line bisecting the region.

Leawood State Representative Pat Colloton was named the Chairwoman of the Council of State Governments Justice Center Board of Directors. The Board was founded in 2006 and has a significant role in improving state justice systems by thoroughly evaluating and recommending "Best Practices" to maximize the utilization of existing state facilities and limited financial resources.

Roger Kemp was one of 13 individuals who received the "Presidential Citizens Medal," the Nation's second-highest civilian honor, from President Obama for his tireless efforts with the Ali Kemp Foundation. The Foundation sponsors programs to teach women across the Country to be more aware of their surroundings and how to fend off an attacker in order to prevent another tragedy such as that which took his daughter's life. Since the Foundation's inception in 2004, almost 50,000 women have participated in these self-defense classes.

Finally, Dr. Willie Lawrence, a Leawood cardiologist, was named "Physician-of-the-Year" by the American Heart Association for his long-time and on-going commitment to serve the residents of the urban core of Kansas City. He was also recognized for his efforts to make people aware of the benefits of prevention and testing before problematic symptoms appear.

I know you will agree that this is a very extraordinary group of Leawood residents with amazing achievements. Please join me in expressing our appreciation to each and every one of them.

This past year marked the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. While their intention was to bring America to her knees, their attempt to do so only strengthened our American spirit and brought us together as a Country. Indeed, the citizens of this great Nation of ours rallied around our flag and each other and vowed to stand defiantly against al-Qaeda or any other terrorist group that dares to threaten the United States of America.

Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, Leawood residents Elizabeth and Katherine Gant, more famously known as “The Gant Sisters,” produced an inspiring tribute to our Country, “America, I Love You!” We are pleased to have the Gant Sister in attendance today. Please enjoy this short video of the Miller-Marley Choir who performed at the City of Leawood’s observance of the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

<http://www.leawood.org/StateoftheCity-video.aspx>

In closing, please accept my sincere appreciation to each of you for your attendance today and your on-going support. It is truly my honor to serve as Mayor of our great community. I wish you all a wonderful 2012!